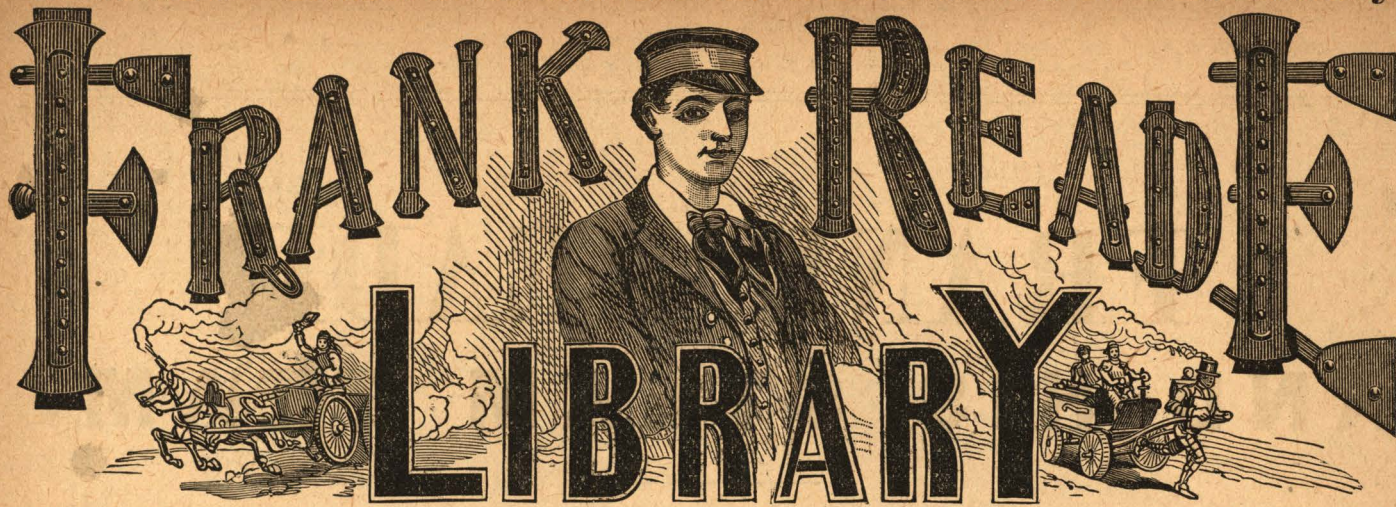


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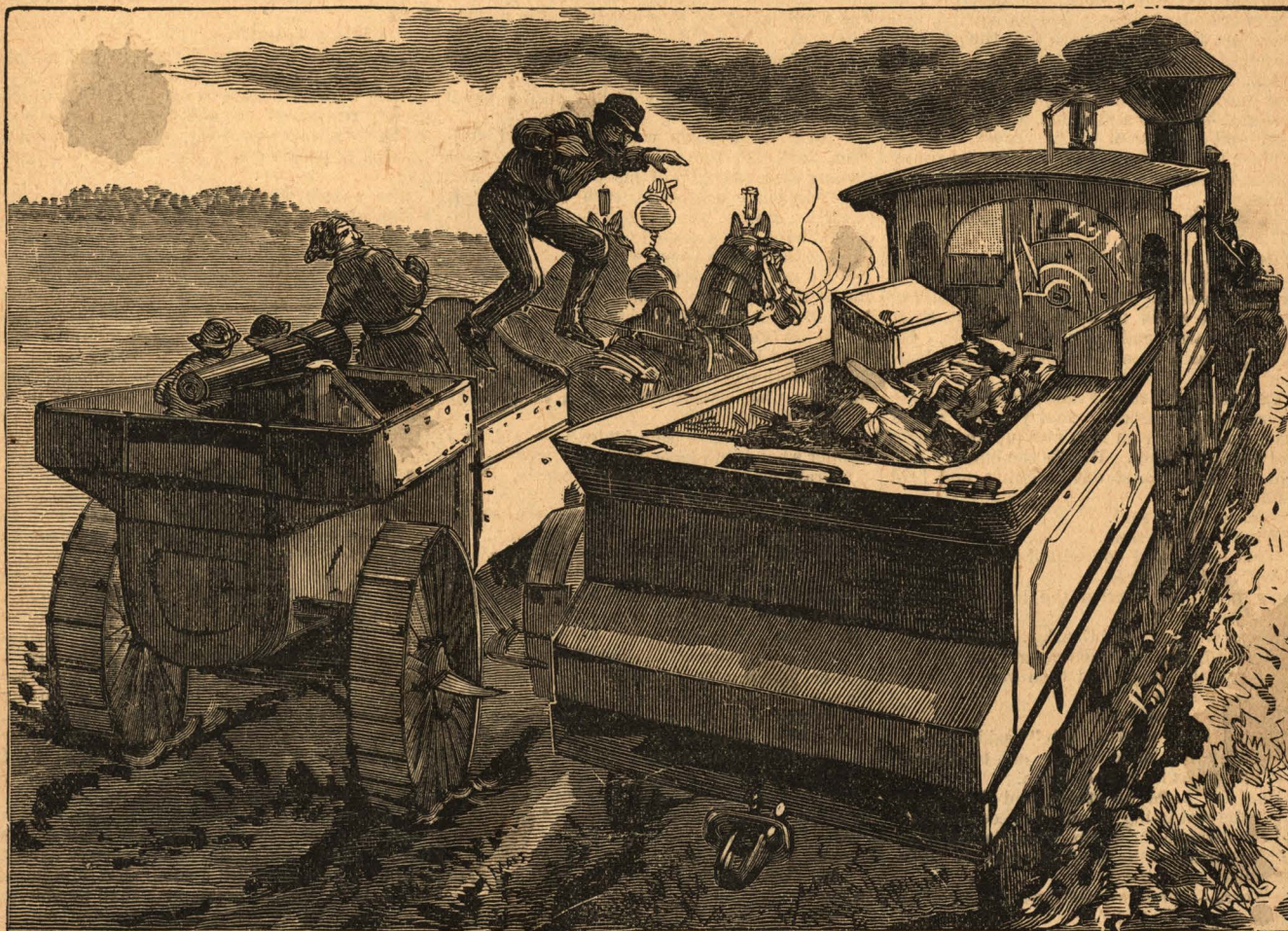
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Vol. I

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# Frank Reade and His Steam Team.

By "NONAME."



At length Frank brought the body of his wagon fairly alongside the bouncing tender, and only about a foot distant from it. "Jump!" said Gorse. The engineer got a good brace, and sprang upward and outward from the wagon.

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# FRANK READE

## AND HIS STEAM TEAM.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Boy Balloonist," "The Crimson Cross," "Tom, Dick and Harry," Etc., Etc., Etc.

### CHAPTER I. THE STEAM TEAM.

"FRANK!"  
"Charley!"

And then the young New York genius grasped the hand of his cousin from the west, and shook it in a manner that plainly told how glad he was to see his visitor.

In the preceding stories of this series, the "Steam Man" and the "Steam Horse," Charley Gorse, the Western cousin, was described as being of ordinary height, broad-shouldered, and strong, just the kind of youth that the glorious west might be expected to produce.

Frank Reade, the inventor of the two wonderful pieces of motive mechanism, was thin and slight, but keen and smart, a thorough mechanic, and a genius of the first order.

"When did you reach New York?" the young inventor asked, as he and his cousin walked into the house.

"This afternoon, and Barney Shea is with me."

"Dear old Barney. How is he?"

"Well and hearty: full of the old Nick as ever, and seems to think that there is nothing better in the world to do than to fight, sing, dance, tell yarns, and play on his fiddle. He will be here as soon as he looks after our baggage."

"Let me see," said Frank; "it's just one year ago to-day since I sold you the Steam Horse, after the Steam Man blew up and nearly killed you and Pomp. How is the horse?"

Charley Gorse burst out laughing, and held his sides.

"Smashed!" he said.

"What?" cried Frank.

"Went crazy, and committed suicide as sure as fate," laughed Gorse.

"Oh, talk plain," cried the inventor of the metal steed.

"It's all Gospel," said Charley. "That Steam Horse went crazy, and then committed suicide. I'll tell you the story, and then you'll be able to see that it's the truth."

"Go ahead," said Frank.

"About two months ago," said Charley Gorse, "my old man moved out to Kansas, about fifty miles from Fort Mann.

"One day I got up steam, and my nigger, Pomp, was just going to put the necessary articles in the wagon for a trip, when Barney Shea, who was sitting at the door playing his fiddle, yelled out:

"'Worra—worra! my Gad! what has got into the horse, at all—at all?"

"I looked up. Nobody stood near the horse, and yet, sure enough, the animal was acting in a most extraordinary manner, kicking and

plunging, springing up into the air, kicking at the wagon with one foot and then with the other, and snorting all the time.

"I was afraid to go near him, and stood watching him for some time, wondering what was up, when suddenly, after an extra plunge and kick, away went the horse towards the north.

"He didn't travel very fast, so Pomp concluded that the best thing we could do would be to follow on horseback, and before the old machine was a mile away we were speeding after on fleet mustangs.

"What do you suppose that Steam Horse did? He rattled along until he came to Pawnee Fork, made a turn, and dashed into a small Pawnee village.

"He knocked down men, women, and children, scattered the reds right and left, kept turning and twisting of his own accord, and finally he made a straight rush for the great council wigwam, the biggest house in the Indian village, and knocked himself all to pieces against the solid wooden walls.

"We saw that there was nothing left of him, and as the reds were getting hostile, we turned our horses' heads towards home, and said goodbye to the Steam Horse."

Although Frank heard of the loss of his invention with regret, yet he could not help laughing when Charley Gorse described the strange antics of the machine.

"Oh, it must have been funny," he said. "I wonder what could have ailed the horse?"

"Crazy as a loon," laughed Charley. "He must have been tired of life, and—"

At this moment a rich voice came up-stairs to their ears, saying:

"Would yez have the extrame nateness and civility, ma'am, to inform Mr. Rade that Esquire Barney Shea, of the town of Clonakilty, County of Cork, Ireland, would like to have the rural felicity of mating him?"

"Come up, Barney," yelled Frank, and in a moment the nimble Irishman, the comrade of the young inventor on former occasions, and the true friend who had stood by him in many a trying hour, bounded up the stairs and caught the slim form in his arms.

"Aha!" he cried, hugging Frank like a bear, "it warrums the cockles of me heart to mate ye ag'in, ye young jaynus."

And Frank was equally glad to see the true-hearted Irishman again.

After their greetings were over, Frank said to Barney:

"Charley just told me about the Steam Horse committing suicide."

"Begob, and he did," said Shea.

"Come with me," said Frank. "I've got

something that beats the life out of the Steam Horse."

Wonderingly his two friends followed the slender young man out of the house.

Frank led them to a spacious and well-made one-story frame building at the rear of the yard, which he had erected as a workshop, in which he could perfect and carry out his various ideas.

He unlocked the door, and Charley and Barney entered.

They both uttered a simultaneous cry of surprise.

"A Steam Team!"

Yes, before them stood the steeds of metal, united by a metallic harness.

They were harnessed to a large wagon, which greatly resembled an oblong box. This was evidently a spacious body, and would hold a number of people and a large quantity of baggage.

The wheels were large and set far apart, which gave firmness to the vehicle when in motion.

"Yes," proudly said Frank, "this is my latest invention—a Steam Team—and having tried them, I can warrant them to go in double harness. They are connected on the same plan as my Steam Horse. The belly contains the boiler and steam-chest, the valves for examination and regulating are on the haunches, the furnace lies in advance of the belly, the door being in the chest, the flues run up through the ears, and the steam escapes by means of the nostrils."

"Splendid," said Frank's cousin.

"Illegant!" cried Barney.

"It will require great practice and skill to drive the Steam Team," said Frank, "for as the power is equally divided it must be equally let on to get a uniform motion. If the reins which control the levers are not pulled evenly, then more power would be let on in one horse than in the other, and the unequal motion would rack the machinery and all else to pieces. The steam power being independent gives me the ability to run around in a circle, by putting on more power in one animal than in the other, which, of course, does not matter for a few seconds, although it would rack things, as I have told you, if the power were not usually equal in both steeds.

"By reversing the power I can make them back, and the sharp spikes on their hoofs doesn't allow them to slip on any surface except glass. I have arranged a small electric light in the head of either horse, and shall be able to travel as well by night as by day, and, moreover, the light will have a startling effect.

"The body of the wagon, as you can see, is high, and when you kneel in it the sides will

form a bullet-proof breastwork for times of danger. At the rear I have mounted a small cannon; it's only a four-pounder, but rifled, and I could do some damage with it if necessary. And I've got a score of new contrivances that I could carry with me."

"Och, wirra—wirra! will I iver go home, I d'now?"

"No," quickly cried Frank Reade. "Stay here and go out west with me and the Steam Team."

"Ye mane it?"

"I do."

"Begorra, I'm with ye, and I'll stand at yer back till the nails d'rop off yer toes, so I will. Horrah! what an illegant lot of rows and ructions may be in shtore for me yit."

"Count me in," said Charley Gorse, in delighted tones, "and you can bet that Pomp is just dying to get on a racket with you once more. He is the best shot in the west to-day—a perfect marvel—and such another rider can't be found anywhere."

"Then," said Frank, "the four of us can take a trip together behind the Steam Team. When will we go?"

"Let's stop a week or so in New York and see the sights," said Charley Gorse, "and then away."

"All right," said Frank. "I shall have ample time to take the machinery apart, and pack it and the wagon in a secure manner for shipment to the west. Everything takes apart, and there will be no trouble in shipping them. Hurrah! once more we'll dash like the winds over the vast plains, once more we'll revel in fun and adventure. I'll wake up the echoes, and strike terror to the wild men of the far west with the loud snort and thundering tramp of my Steam Team!"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE RAID ON REEFER'S BLUFF.

WITHIN a few days' journey of the Missouri border, and not far from Fort Mann, stood the little village of Reefer's Bluff.

We say "stood," for although it may be standing at this moment, yet it was situated in a portion of wild country where villages are liable to be destroyed in a day by some cruel band of prairie fiends, who live by murdering and plundering whenever and wherever occasion offers.

Reefer's Bluff contained quite a sprinkling of houses, a few stores, a tavern or two, the usual blacksmith shop, and a post-office.

One bright morning in June, about the hour of eleven, the village was peaceful and smiling, and the greater part of the men were working on the outlying farms.

Suddenly, without any previous warning, a band of well-mounted men rode into the village, all yelling like demons, and wildly brandishing their weapons.

They numbered at least a hundred men all told, and were made up in as mixed a manner as could be conceived.

There were men of almost every nationality in that band, and also of all colors of the human race; white, red, black, yellow, copper, and all intervening shades.

They were as wicked as they looked, and they looked to be the very worst of thieves and murderers, the scum and off-scourings of the criminals of all lands.

This was the wild border band that descended upon Reefer's Bluff like an avalanche.

At the head of the band rode a man of probably forty years of age, large, heavily made, and wearing a heavy beard that swept low down over his chest. The beard was black, so was the man's hair and eyebrows, and his complexion was nearly as dark as that of a Spaniard who rode at his side.

As they came dashing into the quiet village, one of the store-keepers ran into the street, caught sight of the leader, and yelled out, in a very frightened voice:

"Black Jack—Black Jack!"

This cry was at once taken up by a number of the people who heard the store-keeper, and

the scene that followed almost defies description.

Women caught up their children, and ran shrieking into the house, men ran for their weapons, some of the females fainted with terror, and fell to the ground, and the larger children bawled aloud with fright.

For, be it known, Black Jack was a terror in that region, and had caused more widespread ruin and murder than any other man in the State of Kansas.

The band came to a halt in about the center of the village.

"Spread out!" cried Black Jack.

This was an order that on all such occasions really signified that the men were to divide into several small parties and facilitate the work of plunder.

The men spread out, scattering in all directions.

With a half dozen of his favorite rascals at his side, Black Jack, the murderous leader, spurred to the door of the blacksmith shop, at the very moment that the grimy worker came out.

"That's the man," cried Black Jack, to his men. "He is treasurer of this village, and holds all the cash of the township. Seize him."

They leaped from their horses, and darted upon the smith.

The latter saw his danger, and he tried to leap back into the shop and close the door, but they were too quick for him.

They caught him and held him in spite of his struggles.

"It's no use kicking," roared black Jack, stepping up to the prisoner and striking him a cowardly blow in the face; "you're collared, and you've got to knuckle down."

The blacksmith was held by three big men, and was helpless in their hands.

"Where's your money?" demanded the outlaw.

"I've got none," said the smith.

"You're a liar," roared Black Jack, in a passion. "You're treasurer of this town, and you've got all the funds. I've come here to get the cash, and I'm going to have it, too. Where is the money?"

"Got none," sullenly repeated the blacksmith.

"You've got to tell, and I'll soon bring you to terms!" cried Black Jack, and with the words he rushed quickly into the shop.

A moment later he re-appeared, carrying in his hand a slender bar of iron, which he had just taken from the forge fire.

One end of the bar was glowing at white heat.

"The money?" yelled Black Jack, as he approached the blacksmith with the white-hot bar.

"Got none."

"Where is it?"

No answer.

"I'll make you talk!" savagely said the outlaw, and thrust the iron forward.

It touched the blacksmith on the cheek, and he started with pain.

A sickening odor, the stench that arises from burnt flesh, could be detected.

"The money," snarled Black Jack, his eyes snapping; "I can't fool with you all day."

"You shall kill me before I betray my trust," burst forth the brave blacksmith.

"Oho, that's the talk, is it," cried the now infuriated outlaw. "See if this will bring you to terms."

He laughed again at the blacksmith, and this time the hot iron entered the left eye of the unfortunate man.

He shrieked out in agony, and fell upon the supporting arms of his captors.

"He's dead!" they cried. "The iron has pierced his brain."

"Drop him, then," said Black Jack, in a careless tone. "Served the cursed fool right. There's his house yonder, and we'll get his wife to tell us. Come on, my lads."

Dropping the blacksmith upon the ground, they followed their leader past houses where all sorts of devilry was being carried on by the

members of the desperate band, and in a moment reached the blacksmith's house.

The door was locked.

They kicked at it, and burst it in.

The wife of the blacksmith was then discovered crouching in a corner in an attitude of terror, her two small children nestling close to her side.

She shrieked as she saw the brutal faces of the intruders.

Black Jack leaped forward and caught her by the arm.

He lifted her to her feet in a rude manner.

"Quick!" he cried, "where is the money your husband keeps?"

"Oh, I don't know!" groaned the poor woman, shrinking in terror before the brute.

"Yes, you do!" roared Black Jack; "I'm not going to be balked, curse you, and you'd better answer. I've not got time to fool with you. Where is the money?"

"You shall not know," cried the little woman, with sudden courage, her eyes flashing.

With a wolfish growl Black Jack released her.

The two children were still in the corner, terrified.

The outlaw leader leaped upon the innocent babes.

He caught one of them up in his arms.

The little fellow, a boy of about two years of age, screamed aloud with terror.

The mother tried to run to him, but she was caught and held by two of the men.

Then, with a brutal laugh, Black Jack caught the little boy by the heels, swung him around in a violent manner, and dashed the poor child's head against the wooden wall.

The mother shrieked aloud with agony, but the men prevented her from moving.

The child's head was broken by the blow, and Black Jack dropped him bleeding and insensible to the floor.

Then he caught up the other child.

"Will you tell?" he asked. "Out with it, or out goes the child's brains against the wall. Where is that pile of money?"

"I'll show you," hastily said the agonized mother, and then Black Jack dropped the child.

"Let her go," he said. "She can't get away."

The men released her, and with hasty steps the woman ran to the fire-place.

She removed half a dozen of the bricks that composed part of the hearth, and revealed a box about a foot square, constructed in a very solid manner of iron, with riveted bands and a good lock.

This box was snatched from her by Black Jack.

"That's the ticket," he said, and then, in his usual wanton style, he kicked the poor woman in the stomach and sent her reeling across the room.

She fell breathless on the floor, and then Black Jack said:

"Rake the coals out on the floor and follow me."

A bright fire was burning in the range; one of the men seized the shovel, and scooping up a large quantity of live coals deposited the glowing embers on the floor.

"Come on," said Black Jack.

The brutal rascals left the house, carrying the iron box with them.

A man came running towards them as they gained the road.

"The box—the box," he cried, and ran at them in the most courageous style, though armed only with a hoe.

It was a brother of the blacksmith, and in a reckless way he struck at Black Jack, and knocked him down with the hoe.

An instant later two bullets and a knife were lodged in the breast of the unfortunate settler, and that was the last of him.

Meantime the work of pillage was going on all over the village, and the terrified people had in most cases run away from the raiders.

Three or four houses, including that of the blacksmith, were already in flames.

Horses were being laden with all articles of value that were portable, and everything was completely at the mercy of the wild marauders,

when the clear notes of a bugle rang out on the air.

"Mount and away," shouted Black Jack. "There's a troop of cavalry not far away."

His men leaped upon their steeds, and in a moment were flying out of Reefer's Bluff, carrying with them half, at least, of what was valuable to the hard-working villagers.

They passed away in a cloud of dust, and a moment later there dashed into the village, not a troop of cavalry, as Black Jack thought was approaching, but Frank Reade and his Steam Team.

### CHAPTER III.

#### FRANK'S RIFLE.

WHEN the Steam Team came dashing into the village of Reefer's Bluff, Barney Shea, the rollicking Irishman, was sitting by the side of a short, thick-set negro, with immense mouth, hands and feet.

The Irishman was scraping away on his violin, and the negro, Pomp, was scraping away on a plantation banjo, but when they took in the disastrous scene before them their musical instruments were cast aside, and loaded rifles were caught up instead.

Frank Reade brought the concern to a full stop in front of the blacksmith's shop.

Flames were now leaping up high from many buildings; men, women and children lay dead or wounded in the street, and various articles lay in the road, as though caught up and thrown away by some rude hand.

"What does this mean?" cried Frank Reade, puzzled by the sight.

"I know what it means," cried his cousin; "Reefer's Bluff has been raided by a gang, and the gang has cleared out, leaving this desolation behind. This is not the first time I've seen such a sight."

At this moment a tall form arose from the ground, and stood erect near the wagon. It was the unlucky blacksmith.

His left eye was burned and disfigured in a horrible manner, but otherwise he was uninjured.

He saw his cabin blazing, the house he had erected with his own hands, and in which he had left his wife and children, and he dashed straight to the spot.

By this time the center structure was in flames and burning fiercely.

"Help!" cried the blacksmith. "My wife and children!"

Our friends heard the appeal, and they all ran to him, but could not assist him. The flames beat them back at all points, and they could only stand there helplessly and see the house burn down.

"My wife and children may, possibly, have left it," said the smith. "Wait till it burns down, and I shall know."

Frank questioned him, and in a few words he told what he knew of the raid.

Others of the villagers began to gather around, and told their different stories.

In a short time the house was completely burned down, and pailfuls of water were thrown on the ruins.

Then several men dashed in among the smoking embers.

In a few minutes, the horrible truth was discovered.

The charred bodies of the woman and her two children were drawn out from the ruins, and the blacksmith gazed upon the roasted remains of his cherished family. At the same time, the body of his brother was found.

Not a tear escaped John Gall, the blacksmith. He seemed turned into stone.

"All gone," he said, and there was something terrible in his hard voice. "But Black Jack still lives, and so do I."

And those who heard him utter the words, knew that his life would now be devoted to vengeance on the man who had dealt him this awful blow.

Suddenly Gall strode in among the ruins to the fire-place, and then he made another discovery.

"My friends," he said, "they have taken away my strong-box, containing all the money you have deposited with me as public treasurer."

Upon receiving this information quite an outcry arose, for the loss would reduce many to poverty after years of toil.

"Hold on," shouted Frank Reade. "Give me a moment. Black Jack and his men have carried off everything that was valuable and portable, including a box containing the money deposited by many people with the public treasurer?"

"Yes—yes."

"Then I, Frank Reade, of the city of New York, driver of the great and only Steam Team, engage to get all the plunder out of the hands of these villains, and restore the same to you."

"Hurrah—hurrah!" yelled the much excited people, and cheer upon cheer went up.

"Begorra, we'll do it," said Barney.

"Nebber feah," said Pomp; "wese jest de boys to do de job."

"You will save many of us from being ruined," earnestly said one of the men to Frank. "Those rascals have taken away the savings of years."

"They shall give it all up," positively said Frank. "I'll prove such a terror to them that they'll be glad to drop the booty and escape with their lives."

Then he turned to John Gall, who was gazing upon his ruined house with gloomy eyes.

"Do you want to come with me in pursuit?" he added.

"No," said the blacksmith. "From this hour I am a man-hunter, but my work is in secret, and I shall walk alone. I will hang upon the trail of those blood-stained hounds until I have cut the last one of the murderous gang from the face of the earth. Vengeance alone have I to live for. Let them beware!" And with a savage gleam in his eyes he strode away from the spot.

"Be the powers," cried Barney, "ye kin jist wager that he'll kick up the devil's own shindy wid them."

"All aboard," cried Frank.

His companions sprang into the wagon.

Young Reade examined the tanks, the boiler, and steam-chest, took a glance at his gauge, and then hopped up to his seat, satisfied that all was right, and in working order.

"Good-bye," he shouted, "I'll bring back your valuables."

"Good luck to you."

"Clear the track."

And then, with a double snort, the Steam Team dashed away from Reefer's Bluff at a spanking pace.

Frank and his party had started on the previous night from the Gorse farm, and to the delight of all everything worked in first-class order.

They had camped all night in a grove, and here upon the morning of their second day out, they had stumbled upon an adventure.

"I say, Frank," said Charley Gorse, as they flew along after the outlaws of the west, "you don't intend to tackle that whole band?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why, there's a hundred of 'em."

"That doesn't make any difference to me," said Frank. "My plan is this: to hang upon their track, and hover around them day after day, all the time annoying them with bullets, and to keep picking them off until they are greatly reduced in numbers, or else drop their plunder. I have made a rifle with my own hands, made the powder for it, and also the bullets, and furnished the weapon with a telescopic sight. In the hands of an accurate marksman, and with my powder and ball, I warrant my rifle to kill at the distance of two miles."

"Thunder!" cried Charley. "That takes the cake for shooting."

"Jes' lemme have dat ar weapon," pleaded the darkey. "Oh, crikey, what a gun dat ar mas' be, fo' shuah."

The Steam Team was dashing along at the rate of thirty miles an hour, when the driver handed the wonderful rifle to the black dead shot.

"It's loaded," said Frank, and just at that moment he caught sight of the moving body of outlaws, a couple of miles ahead.

"Draw a bead on them, Pomp," he said, and up went the rifle, the nig looking through the telescope.

Crack!

Something dark went up into the air as it became detached from the moving column.

"Kill de hoss an broke de rider's neck, fo' shuah," cried Pomp, and a cheer for the rifle went up to the skies.

They now dashed down rapidly on the outlaws, and while the black was reloading Barney and Charley got out their rifles, and as soon as they were in range they began firing ahead upon the prairie banditti.

Their rifles rang out together, and in a moment it was seen that they had created confusion in the ranks of the enemy.

"I mustn't get too close," said Frank, slackening speed, when just at that moment the entire band turned like a troop of cavalry, and came dashing down towards them, firing as they came on.

Frank tumbled over backwards into the body of the wagon to escape the fire, the others knelt down; with a steady pull Frank turned his Team to the left, and dashed away, followed by Black Jack and his band.

### CHAPTER IV.

#### A COWARDLY SHOT.

WHEN the Steam Team bounded away over the plains, becoming now pursued instead of the pursuer, Barney Shea could not refrain from giving a yell of delight.

"Hooroo!" he cried, sending forth a wild Irish yell, and flourishing his pet weapon, a tough old blackthorn shillelah—"hooroo! the ould toimes are coming agen. Sure, there niver in the wurru'd was sich an illigant counthry for foighthin'."

Frank controlled his team with a steady hand, and kept ahead of the outlaws.

These latter, in solid form, came along at a slashing pace, being all well mounted.

They were evidently red-hot in their desire for revenge, and amid all the noise Frank could hear the fellows swear.

"They're mad," said Gorse.

"Let them be mad," said Frank. "By the looks of them they will hang on for a long time yet."

"Then why not clap on greater steam and leave them hopelessly behind?"

"I've got an idea worth two of that, and I'm going to carry it out in a few minutes," said Frank. "Did you ever read the story of 'The Pirate,' by Marryatt?"

"No," said Gorse. "What about the yarn?"

"In the story," said Frank, "the pirate attacked a large merchantman that was well manned and armed. The merchantman scorned her small antagonist and made for the little craft. The pirate ran away from the big ship, and being a very fast sailer got out of shot-range from the merchantman, and then opened fire on the big craft with a Long Tom gun, riddling the enemy with balls from bow to stern, while the poor merchantman's shot all fell short and dropped in the sea. I am going to try the same dodge with my new rifle."

"I see," said Charley.

"Pomp," said Frank.

"Yes, sah."

"Rifle all loaded?"

"Yes, sah."

"Then away we go, and as soon as you are sure that their bullets can't reach you then send one of your bullets at them."

"Oh, Lordy, dat ar 'am a 'stonishin' cute idea!" cried Pomp.

Frank let on more steam.

With increased speed the team drew away from Black Jack's band.

Little by little the distance increased, and at length the darkey concluded that he was safe.

He rose up, and stood erect in the commodious wagon.

Crackety—crack—crack!

A rattling volley was fired at him instantly by the horde of yelling pursuers.

The bullets all fell short.

"Safe!" cried Frank. "We are out of rifle shot from them."

They all stood up to watch Pomp's shot.

The black marksman slowly glanced through the glass sight.

"Gemmen," he said, "dar's a niggar in dat ar band, and he's a disgrace to de race. I'm gwine to bore a hole froo his head."

Charley Gorse caught up Frank's strong field-glass to better note the effect of the shot.

Crack!

The bullet had gone.

"Hi—yah!" yelled Pomp.

"Bully boy!" cried Charley.

For, as they all could plainly see, the bullet had not only knocked the colored thief over, but had also struck the man behind, and they were now both hanging by their stirrups head downwards.

Crash! Another volley rang out, but the bullets did not come near the wagon.

The outlaws were furious, and they lashed their horses wildly.

"Give it to them!" cried Frank. "Load and fire as fast as you can, Pomp."

"I se heah ebry time," cried the black dead shot, and he sent bullet after bullet into the crowded ranks with terrible accuracy.

Half a dozen of these death-dealing shots sufficed to discourage the now terribly incensed but impotent bandits, and they turned tail.

"They're takin' the back thrack!" shouted Barney Shea. "Arrah, Frank, me jewel, would yez have the extrame nateness to run after and catch up wid 'em, so that I can have a crack at thim wid me blackthorn sthick?"

"I'd like to oblige you, Barney, but that is not my programme," replied the young leader. "I'm going to pursue them now at the same distance that I led them, and Pomp can keep on galling them."

"That's the ticket," cried Gorse; "what a smashing idea. They can't gobble us up, because they can't catch us, and they can't get out of the range of that rifle, because we can keep just within shot and be out of danger ourselves. Oh, won't we make them sick?"

"That's just my idea," said Frank. "What I want to do is to pursue them just in this way until I either reduce them so in numbers that we can attack them ourselves, or else make the rascals drop their plunder. One of the two we'll certainly do."

Pomp had certainly picked off fully ten of the outlaws before the rascals began to see a haven of safety in a large cluster of trees that formed a grove.

They made a straight dash for the protecting grove, and were soon under shelter.

Frank turned slightly aside, and began to describe a large circle around the grove, keeping well out of rifle shot.

But before he had gone two hundred yards in this big circle, he heard a shout and a yell.

The occupants of the wagon looked towards the grove, from which the noise came.

To their surprise they saw a man, mounted on a mule, spur out from the cluster of trees, and dash away as though pursued by Old Nick.

And although the latter gentleman was not after him, a half dozen of the outlaws certainly were.

The mule had a good start, which was very fortunate, for though he might have been a sure-footed and patient animal, he certainly was not very speedy.

"Here goes to help the party on that mule," said Frank, turning his metal steeds towards the scene of this fresh excitement. "Pomp, get ready for biz."

"I se dar ebry time," said the black, as he finished loading.

"And be jabbers," said Barney, "I'd be there, too, do ye moind, but I loike to use me short range weapon best, an' we've not kim to close quarters yit. Ah, Frank, ma bouchal, jist land me in the cinter o' that gang, and see me lay thim out in the illegantest sthyle wid me blackthorn sthick."

"Keep cool, and you'll have your hands full yet," said Frank, and with a fine burst of speed closed the gap between the team and the pursuing outlaws.

The mule had got about a quarter of a mile away from the grove, when the foremost pursuer caught up with him, and grasped the bridle rein.

The mule gave a twitch, released its head by jerking the reins from the man's hand, and then wheeled like lightning and kicked up with its hind legs.

The man that rode the mule was sent flying over the animal's head, and the rascal who had clutched at the reins was knocked out of his saddle by the twinkling hoofs.

And then, at that moment of victory, the mule ran away, leaving its rider on the ground.

"Hurrah!"

And with a united cheer from those who rode behind, the Steam Team came dashing up to the spot, Pomp and Charlie firing their rifles.

But when the prairie bandits saw them coming they did not wait to dispute the matter with them, but clapped spurs to their horses and got away with all speed.

The black dead shot wounded one man, and he hung across his galloping horse in a painful way as the animal rushed back to the grove; Charlie's bullet struck the horse instead of the rider aimed at, but only resulted in making the animal dash on at increased speed.

The man who had been kicked by the mule still lay senseless on the ground.

The mule's rider was just getting up from the grassy plain.

Frank brought the team to a stop, and his three companions jumped down and ran to the man they had rescued. He was looking around him in a dazed manner, as though unable to comprehend just what had happened to him.

"You're all right, my friend," cheerily cried Charley Gorse. "Your mule has skipped out, but you are safe and sound."

The rescued man was a very sedate and sober-looking individual of about forty years of age, with a body like a lath, a face like a hatchet, a mouth like a big slit, and hair that reached below his neck.

"What has happened?" he said, as though still puzzled. "You must know, gentlemen, that I am Professor Isaac Newton Smith, and I am in this part of the country with one of my—"

Crack!

A shot rang out.

They all turned around, startled by the unexpected report.

The man who had been kicked by the mule was now on his feet, and running towards the grove, a smoking pistol held swinging from his right hand.

"Look!" cried Charley, and the others looked up in time to see Frank Reade stagger on his seat, and then fall heavily to the ground.

## CHAPTER V.

### SUSPENDED ANIMATION.

CHARLEY GORSE understood what had happened at once.

The outlaw had merely been stunned, and when he had recovered from the kick he had received, the rascal had taken a sly shot at Frank Reade ere he ran away.

The first impulse of all three of them was to run after the brute, but in an instant they recognized the very dangerous fact that the chase after the rascal would soon bring them within range of the rifles, which were now to be seen glittering among the trees at the edge of the grove, so they let the fellow slide and ran to Frank.

"Is he kilt entirely?" shouted Barney Shea.

"I hope not," said Charley, but he felt bad.

The black dwarf outran them, and reached Frank first.

On his face, by the side of the Steam Team, lay the young genius.

"Fo' de Lord, I tink he really am gwine, fo' suah!" cried Pomp, as he tenderly turned Frank over. "Looker dar; shot in de head."

"Poor Frank," almost sobbed Charley Gorse, and a tear came into his eye.

"Begorra, and is the gossoon dead and gone?" cried Shea; "oh, murder and greens, he can't be really kilt, I know betther."

"Perhaps," said Prof. Smith, putting in his oar, "perhaps I may be able to determine—"

"Danger!" roared Pomp.

"Tare an' ouns, the devils are comin' for us ag'in," cried Barney.

"Lively!" roared Gorse. "Pomp!"

"Yes, sar."

"Into the wagon with him."

The black caught up Frank Reade's limp form, and clambered into the wagon.

What was the matter?

Why, the outlaws, seeing the Steam Team standing still, were making a charge upon them in force.

"All aboard!" cried Charley Gorse, springing for Frank's seat, and seizing the reins.

Barney dragged Prof. Smith into the vehicle.

"We're all aboard!" he yelled, and then Charley started the Team.

They dashed away at a wonderful pace, and the heavy wagon fairly bounded from the earth with the usual speed.

The pursuing outlaws set up a yell of rage, and fired a useless volley after them.

In less than five minutes our friends were a mile or more away from the prairie bandits, and then these latter, probably remembering the wonderful long range rifle, gave up the pursuit and once more took the back track.

Pomp crouched in the bottom of the wagon with Frank in his arms.

Charley ran on a little further, for he saw another little grove, and he thought it would be better to stop there and examine Frank than to do so in the sunshine, which was now very hot.

He pulled up at the edge of the grove, under the shade of a tree, and then turned to speak to the new member of the company.

Professor Smith was bending over the young inventor, as the latter lay in Pomp's arms.

"Well?" said Gorse.

"Is the gossoon kilt?" inquired the gallant Irishman.

"No," promptly said Professor Smith, "he is not killed."

"Hurrah!" cried Gorse, swinging his cap up.

"Hooroo!" yelled Shea, and then they both shook hands in the wildest fashion, and hugged one another in their excess of joy, for they both idolized Frank Reade.

"I am a scientist," remarked Professor Smith, and am somewhat familiar with all sciences. This is merely a case of suspended animation, and is owing to the pressure of a bone on the brain. Look."

He pointed to the side of Frank's head, which was all bloody.

"Now, observe," he said, in his pompous style; and, taking a wet handkerchief, he wiped away the blood, by which act he revealed the fact that something hard and round was imbedded under the skin.

"That lump is the bullet," he said. "It has gone pretty deep, and had it but gone half an inch deeper, it would have killed him. At present he is just as good as dead, and would certainly die if that bullet were not removed. Yet a miss is as good as a mile, and when I remove the ball he will only need an hour or two in which to recover and be as well as ever."

"Begob, I kin philosophize and so forth," said Barney Shea, "but that bates me."

"Thunder! how glad I am!" was all Gorse, could say.

While delivering his little lecture, the professor was not idle, but had produced a case containing lancet, scissors, needle, thread, plaster and salve, besides a few tiny bottles that contained powders, and also liquid medicines.

"Begorra, and the mon is a reg'lar walking docther-shop," said Shea.

Prof. Smith took a piece of the plaster, gave it to Charley, with the scissors, and bade him cut it in strips.

Barney he commanded to bring a bowl of water.

Pomp was to hold the patient just as steadily as possible.

Poor Frank lay like dead in the arms of the powerful negro.

Very carefully Prof. Smith cut into the skin on the side of the lad's head, the others watching him with intense eagerness, and praying that the sharp lancet might not slip.

Very skillfully the man of science made the incision, cutting until the bullet was laid bare, and then, with a pair of nippers, he seized the troublesome piece of metal and drew it out.

Then he seized Frank's head between both his hands, front and back, and gave it a squeeze.

"Lively, now," he said, releasing the head and catching up the water from Barney.

He hastily washed away the blood from the wound, and then applied the strips of plaster to the cut, and in a moment the job was done in proper style.

"The operation is concluded," said the professor. "Now to give Nature just a little assistance."

He uncorked one of the little bottles from his case, and dropped just a trifle of the liquid between Frank Reade's lips.

The effect was wonderful.

In a moment Frank's chest began to heave; a wheezing sound could be heard; he coughed, sneezed, and gasped for breath, and then opened his eyes.

Regardless of consequences, Charley, Pomp and Barney set up another cheer.

"They couldn't kill the jaynus," cried the wild Irishman.

Frank looked around him with the utmost wonder.

"How do you feel?" asked Gorse.

"I feel a bit dizzy, but otherwise I'm all right," said Frank.

"You've had a close shave," said Gorse, and then he told Frank all that had taken place, and what had been done for him by the professor.

"And," said the professor, "you should keep perfectly quiet, if only for half an hour, by which time you may be all right. While you are resting I will take a glance at your wonderful Steam Team."

And he examined the invention with all the appreciation of a scientific man.

"Pomp," said Charley, "while we're making this stop we may as well have our dinner."

"Dat's a fac," said Pomp, and he made a dive for the wagon.

He came back laden with a small portable stove, some pots and pans, and something to cook.

Frank Reade carried everything for comfort and safety.

Pomp soon had a fire started, and in short order some steaks were broiled and coffee was made.

Frank declared that he was all right, and insisted on sitting up and eating his dinner. During the course of the meal the professor told them that he was in company with a friend, making a tour of the west, and prospecting as they went along for coal, iron, copper, or gold.

"And we were just resting in the grove when that cut-throat horde poured in upon us," said the professor. "We both mounted our mules, but I guess we must have taken different courses in our alarm."

"Oh, we'll find your friend," said Frank Reade. "And your uncle, too."

When dinner was over, the darkey got out his banjo, Barney tuned up his fiddle, and they played a rattling duet.

"Now give us a song, Pomp," requested Frank, and the obliging darkey reeled off the following in his rich voice:

"DE GAL FROM DE SOUF."

"Oh, once I had a yaller gal,  
She come up from de souf;  
Her ha'r it curled so bery tight  
She could not shut her mouf."

"I took her to de tailor shop,  
To hab her mouf made small,  
Me gal she took in one long breff,  
An' swallowed the tailor an' all."

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the company, at the conclusion of the song.

"Begorra, and that was a mouth, and no mistake," said Barney. "And be the same token it reminds me that I sing a devilish good song about a faymale that lived in the town of Clonmel, and she had a mouth that was fairful to behold. I'm not much of a singist, but I'll try me best to entertain ye. Pomp, would yez have the extrame nateness to assist?"

"I'se dar," said Pomp, and Barney Shea struck up a "come all ye" melody on his violin, when—

"Danger!" shouted Charley Gorse, and sprang they lost to his feet with his rifle in his hand.

## CHAPTER VI.

### TWO OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

WHEN Black Jack and his men, in their eagerness to escape from the long range rifle, hastened into the grove, they came upon two men.

These latter grew alarmed as they glanced at their unwelcome visitors, and hastily leaping upon their mules, they made tracks.

One of these men, as the reader has learned, was the professor, and we know that he dropped into good hands.

The other one, his comrade, we will now take a glance at.

For no special reason other than that they felt ripping, tearing mad, and wanted to vent their passion on somebody, a number of the gang pursued the travelers, but, as we know, they lost money on the professor.

The companion of the man of science was a young man with blonde hair and whiskers; he was dressed in a style that would have been just correct for Broadway, and wore a pair of gold-bowed eye-glasses on his nose, through which his blue eyes shone mildly.

He was certainly a queer-looking sort of a character to meet on the plains of the rough and ready west.

The mule on which he was mounted was a much fleetier animal than the professor's, and seemed to share its rider's fright, fairly flying over the plains.

But, strangely enough, as the professor went out at one side of the grove, this foppishly-dressed gentleman with the eye-glasses went out at the other side.

Away he went, clinging to his mule in a desperate manner; the breeze lifted his eye-glasses from the bridge of his nose, and they streamed out behind him on a broad silken cord, like a whip pennant.

The mule had it all his own way, so far as the course went, for his rider's sole idea was to maintain his seat, and the animal seemed determined to reach another of the numerous groves that abounded in that vicinity.

It was about a mile distant, and there were good horses behind him, but the mule held his own.

"Half a dozen of you bring that yaller-whiskered chap back here, and let me wipe my feet on the critter," was the order that Black Jack had issued.

There were seven men who started in pursuit of the fugitive.

The mule made good time, and got to the grove first.

The outlaws spread out in a circle, surrounded the grove, and rode out with a yell of triumph.

To their great surprise they found that the man they pursued had ridden into an encampment of Indians, and was just being rudely dragged from his mule by a couple of tall redskins.

"Hold h'on—hold h'on, I say," cried the chap with the whiskers, trying to preserve his balance; "h'I really must h'enter a protest h'against this h'outrage, you know. This h'is not the way to h'andle a respectable member h'of the British h'aristocracy, you know, h'and I can't allow it, you know."

But whether he allowed it or not, he was roughly pulled from the saddle and sent sprawling on the ground.

There were about twenty men, and perhaps four or five squaws in the encampment.

The outlaws pulled up short when they saw the Indians.

"Hold on, there," said one, who acted as leader; "that man you've got is our prisoner."

The chief of the Indian band, a very dirty-looking rascal, looked him full in the eye, and sneeringly said:

"Can you take him away from Momser and his braves?"

"Well, we've got orders to take him, and we're going to do it. You know us; we're Black Jack's men, and he's over yonder in that grove with the gang."

But Momser didn't seem to scare worth a cent.

"Me know you," he said. "You tell Black Jack that Momser will strip the man with the four eyes, and then he can have him."

"Don't quarrel h'about me, gentlemen, h'I beg h'of you," said the Englishman, peering at them through his glasses. "H'I really 'ope that—"

But what he did or did not really hope was not ascertained at that moment; one of the squaws turned, took one glance at him, and then made a straight dive for the speaker.

She caught him by the hair, pulled a knife from her belt, flourished it above her head, and yelled out some words in the Indian tongue which sounded like a challenge.

The Englishman looked up into the face of the blood-and-thunder squaw who clutched his hair, and gave a gasp.

"H'upon me soul!" he cried, "h'it's the Widow Shobbusguy, h'as sure h'as my name h'is George h'Augustus Fitznoodle."

Yes, after all this lapse of time our Cockney friend, Fitznoodle, one of Frank Reade's former companions, and the lovely Widow Shobbusguy, who had made the Englishman her husband, and thereby saved him from death, had come together again.

"H'oh Lord—h'oh Lord!" groaned poor Fitznoodle, "this h'is h'only h'out h'of the flying pan h'into the fire. She 'as got a devil h'of a temper, h'and h'I don't care h'about matrimony with 'er h'as partner."

"Do you hear?" cried Momser to the outlaws. "The squaw claims the prisoner. She married him a long time ago."

"He b'long Shobbusguy," snarled the squaw. "You can no take he away Shobbusguy."

"The — we can't," roared the leader of the white men. "We've got orders to bring him back, and we're going to do it, in spite of yer hull tribe. Boys, the first blow is half the battle, so let them have it!"

Acting under this idea, the white men drew their revolvers, and fired an indiscriminate volley among their foes.

Two or three of the red-skins bit the dust at the first fire, and several more were wounded.

The rest, although outnumbering the white men two to one, were thrown into confusion by the unexpected volley, and the prairie bandits took advantage of the moment to charge directly upon Fitznoodle, with the idea of galloping off with him before the red-skins recovered their senses.

But there they were just a little bit out in their reckoning.

They had made no allowance for the widow.

And Shobbusguy, be it known to the readers, was a tearer.

She stood over the man she claimed for a husband, and brandished her knife in a wicked manner.

The white rascals rode directly at her, and made a clutch at poor Fitznoodle.

But the female guardian met the move in gallant style.

She made a lightning-like thrust, and the keen blade split the very heart of the foremost rider.

Down he went, tumbling from the saddle like a log.

"Protect me!" roared Fitznoodle. "Oh, dusky angel, protect me."

And she did protect him by scouring her knife over the ribs of the next man, and making a wicked stab at the third rider.

She missed him, but forced him to turn aside,

and at that instant her friends recovered their wits and rushed to her aid.

Then the fight became hand-to-hand at once. Pistols flashed, and bullets whizzed through the air, and the knives of the combatants gleamed brightly.

The lovely Widow Shobbusguy took a hand in, and slashed away like a tigress, while Fitznoodle, the cause of the row, meekly crawled under a bush to get out of the way.

The fight was short, sharp, and very deadly.

Five of the seven white men were killed, and about the same number of Indians had gone to the happy hunting-grounds, when the two surviving outlaws discreetly gave up the unequal contest and left the grove in hot haste.

"H'oh, Lord! h'i h'am doomed!" groaned the Cockney, when the Widow Shobbusguy, in a triumphant style dragged him out from under the bush. "She'll 'old me tight now. H'oh, h'if Frank Reade were h'only 'ere to rescue me from this 'orrible fate."

Little did he dream how nearly Frank was at hand!

## CHAPTER VII.

### A STRANGE SCENE.

WHEN Charley Gorse leaped to his feet with rifle in hand and shouted out "danger!" he certainly had cause for alarm.

His quick ears had caught the distant and rather confused sounds of yells, oaths, and a peculiar rumbling noise.

What the cause of all this was he could not conjecture, but he anticipated danger, and he gave the alarm.

The rest of the party sprang up, and the musical instruments were soon stowed away.

One of the most peculiar sights ever seen on the plains of the west greeted the gaze of the party.

A large locomotive, such as are used on the Kansas Pacific Railroad, was coming over the plains on a course that would bring it pretty close to the grove occupied by the party.

There were no cars attached to the engine, but the tender still clung to its leader.

From the peculiar formation of the truck-wheels, they cut rather deeply into the ground; but under a high pressure of steam, the rate of speed was fully twenty miles an hour, despite this impediment.

Four men could be seen clinging to the tender, which bounced up and down at a lively rate, and at any moment was liable to dislodge them from their hold.

In the cab, with one hand on the lever, stood the engineer.

Even as our friends caught sight of him, the engineer seized a hammer from the floor of his cab, and with accurate aim threw it at one of the men clinging to the tender.

It struck the fellow on the head, and with a despairing cry he let go his hold on the tender and tumbled headlong to the ground.

The other three men, evidently desperate characters and enemies of the brave engineer, were unable to attack him, for the jolting and bouncing of the tender gave them enough to do just to hold on.

They yelled out curses at the top of their voices, threatening the engineer with terrible things if he didn't stop, but he kept right on.

"Did yez ever see the bate o' that?" cried Barney Shea.

"I never did," said Charley.

"Is that engineer crazy?" demanded Frank Reade.

"No, you bet he ain't," said Gorse. "I'll wager that this is the result of some train-wrecking business. Get aboard, and let's give him a lift."

They all jumped up into the wagon, and Frank seized the reins.

He pulled a wire, and the Steam Team neighed in the heartiest fashion.

The engineer on board the locomotive heard the sound, and turned to see what it was.

Meantime Gorse had caught up an opera-glass.

With this he scanned the men clinging to the tender.

"Pepper them!" he shouted, dropping the glass and catching up his loaded rifle. "I know their faces, and they are train-wreckers."

By this time the locomotive was close to the grove, and just as it was going by, Pomp and Charley blazed away at the men on the tender, and the wild Irishman yelled:

"Bring me to close quarters."

Both Pomp and Charley fired hastily, not waiting to take much aim, and in addition to this fact, the human targets were bouncing up and down like rubber balls.

Therefore, it is not surprising that they both missed.

But the bullet sent by the black dead-shot whizzed uncomfortably close to the ear of one of the rascals, and it served to terrify him.

He yelled out something to his two remaining comrades, and at once they dropped from the tender.

Of course they rolled over and over like balls when they struck the hard earth, and the fall must have been productive of bruises and sore bones, but in a moment they were upon their feet, and running away as fast as possible.

The engineer, finding that he was no longer in danger, shut off steam, and came to a stop about four or five hundred yards from the grove.

"We'll wait here," said Charley, "he will come to us."

And in a few moments the engineer walked to the grove, leaving his locomotive standing out on the plain.

He stared in open-mouthed wonder at sight of the Steam Team, and would, no doubt, have gazed upon them in silent wonder for half an hour, had not Frank Reade tapped him on the shoulder.

"This is the Steam Team," said the young genius. "I'm the inventor and driver, and this is my party. Don't stand there with your mouth open, but tell us what is the matter?"

The man, a plucky-looking person of middle age, suddenly came to his senses.

He turned around, and spoke in a quick, sharp manner.

"I'm the engineer of the train that left Council Grove this morning, bound to the West. Less than half an hour ago, as we were running along at a pretty lively rate of speed, I saw a crowd of men, mounted and on foot, at the side of the track. I suspected that it meant danger, and tried my best to stop in time, but the first thing I knew my engine and tender jumped from the track, pulling the train of six cars after."

"The crowd at the side of the track had to scatter, or we would have gone through them. We ran about a hundred yards from the track, and then smash went the couplings, and the train was detached from the tender. I pulled up as soon as I could, my fireman putting on the brakes."

"And then?" impatiently said Frank, as the engineer paused, breathless from his rapid narration.

"Then," continued the engineer, "the fireman jumped down to see what was the matter like a fool, and the first I knew I saw him drop down with a bullet in him."

"Then a dozen of the gang started for me. I didn't know what they wanted, but I didn't want them, so I let on a full head of steam, with the idea of getting away."

"Five of 'em jumped on the tender just as I started, but they had no show to pop me, because they could only hold on. One fell off, another got my hammer at his head and dropped, and you know what became of the rest."

"How many cars were there?" asked Frank Reade.

"Six."

"Well filled?"

"Yes."

"Plenty of good men?"

"Yes, there may have been a hundred men in the cars, and armed, too; but the most of them are 'drummers,' and more used to trade than fighting. But it's likely they're making a fight for their lives, and if your party will come along with this Steam Team—"

"Oh, I'll help them," said Frank. "I'm only waiting for this sort of a thing every day in the

week. Pomp, lay out your loads for this long-range rifle, and we'll astonish them."

"Hi yah!" laughed the darkey.

"After him!" suddenly cried Charley Gorse, cocking his rifle and starting out from the grove on the jump. "The locomotive!"

The others looked.

"Tare an' ouns!" cried Shea.

"Curse the luck!" cried the engineer, for now they all saw that one of the men who had dropped from the tender had in a very cunning manner managed to reach the engine, and was now in the cab, and had let on a head of steam.

The train-wrecker thrust his head out from the cab, and Charley Gorse fired at the fellow.

A fierce scream told very plainly that the bullet had struck him, and they could see that he staggered, but the wound was not so severe as to keel him over.

The locomotive started but now the steam was reversed, and the engine took the back track, pursuing about the same route that it had made in its journey to the grove.

In an instant it came flying past the trees, and the train-wrecker crouched low in the cab.

"There goes my pride," sorrowfully said the engineer.

"I'll recover it for you," cheerily said Frank Reade. "Jump aboard, all of you, and in less than no time we'll have that engine back, and then we'll rush on to the rescue of that train."

"Hooroo!" cried Barney. "Shure, there niver was such a counthry for divarsion."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FRANK'S FOUR-POUNDER.

THE reversed locomotive had not gone five hundred yards beyond the grove, when Frank Reade, with all the party in the wagon, started the Steam Team in pursuit.

The train-wrecker had evidently put on a full head of steam, and the engine was running back towards the railroad as fast as it had run away from it.

Frank's plastered head itched greatly, and tormented him with a desire to scratch, but otherwise he was as well as ever, and in no wise hurt by the wound which had so nearly caused his death.

Professor Smith and the engineer watched the movements of the Team with the greatest delight.

It took just about five minutes for Frank to get the Team ahead of the rushing locomotive, and then Pomp had the show he had been waiting for.

He caught sight of the rascal in the cab, and with rapid aim he fired upon him, and hit him.

The train-wrecker plunged forward with such violence, when he received the bullet, that he hurled himself from the cab.

"That settles him," said Gorse, as the body fell from the engine.

"Yes," rather excitedly said the engineer, "but it just strikes me that we ought not to have shot him."

"Why not?"

"Because he would have stopped the engine when he wanted. Now it will keep on, and may smash right into the cars."

"Thunder!" cried Charley.

"That will never do," said Frank.

"How will you prevent it?" groaned the engineer.

"I'll tell you," said Frank. "I'll steer up close to it, and you must jump into the body of the tender. You may get a few bruises, but you may also save a great many lives."

"I'll do it," said the plucky engineer. "I've no doubt the engine would smash into the cars where the passengers are besieged."

"They may have given in long ago to the robbers," said Charley.

"Perhaps so," said the engineer, "but I think not."

Frank carefully moderated the speed of his Team, until he was once more in the rear of the plunging locomotive, which, of course, ran as well alone as when under the hands of the best engineer.

Then the young genius increased his speed gradually, and slowly drew up to the tender.

At length he brought the body of his wagon fairly alongside the bouncing tender, and only about a foot distant from it.

"Jump!" said Gorse.

The engineer got a good brace, and sprang upward and outward from the wagon.

He landed safely in the bottom of the tender, and in a moment was on his feet, and crawling over into the cab.

"I'll stay here," he said, with his hand on the lever; "you run on just as fast as you can straight ahead, and I'll follow you."

"All right."

And then, with a grand burst of speed, away went the Steam Team to the rescue.

Pomp loaded all the rifles, and each member of the party except the man of science examined his pistols.

"I am not a man of war," said the professor; "but you may find me very useful after the row is over."

"Patchin' heads, is it?" grinned Shea, with a comical leer. "Begorra, it's meself that's only axin' for a welt in the gob—what de ye see, Charley, dear?"

Gorse had picked up the glass, and was adjusting it to obtain a view.

"I see them," cried Charley. "The cars are all together on the plains, just a few hundred yards this side of the track, and there's a number of men mounted and on foot banging away with guns. Oh, I understand it all now. The train-wreckers pepper away with their rifles at ordinary range, and the men in the car, armed only with revolvers, cannot return the fire with effect, the bullets falling short. Put us there lively, Frank, or the rascals may wound any number of women and children."

"All right," said Frank. "Ah, I begin to see them now. Ready with that rifle, Pomp, you're nearly within range."

"I see ready," said the black, and picked up the wonderful gun.

He put it to his shoulder, and glanced through the telescopic sight.

"I see got one ob de coons," he cried, and pulled the trigger.

"You knocked him," said Gorse, who was looking through his glass. "Now for some short-range work."

The Steam Team advanced rapidly, and the unusual scene soon burst in full view before the occupants of the wagon.

They saw the six cars standing on the plain in almost a straight line, the window blinds up for the evident purpose of concealment and partial protection, while, out of pistol-shot range, fully a hundred men were gathered, some mounted and others on foot, as wild and murderous a lot as ever rode the vast prairies of the west.

Frank took one good glance at them, and then he pulled up.

"We can't fight them with ordinary sort of weapons at close quarters," he said, to his companions. "We must tackle them in another way."

And he leaped down into the body of the wagon.

"Take the reins," he said to Gorse, and the latter did so.

They had halted about a quarter of a mile from the cars, in full view of the train robbers.

These latter had been thrown into some confusion by the shot from Frank's wonderful rifle, and until they saw the Steam Team had evidently not been able to account for the source of the mysterious bullet.

But now they caught sight of Frank Reade's party, and fully fifty of the mounted rascals spurred towards our friends, yelling and shrieking in a crazy style.

Charley Gorse very promptly started the Team, swerved a little to the left, and ran about the same course as the railroad.

"Not too fast," said Frank, who was on his knees before one of the lockers at the side of the wagon, "because I only want to keep out of their reach until I can thin them out."

"All right," said Gorse. "I can manage the Team."

Frank produced two or three large cartridges from the locker, and in a moment was bending over the four-pounder at the rear of the wagon.

The little cannon was a breech-loader, and Frank could handle the piece very rapidly.

He shoved in his prepared cartridge, lifted the hammer, attached his string, and then stood back a few feet.

"Out of the way," he said. "The thing might kick, for the ball that I put in is not a four pound one, but a hollow shell, filled with explosive matter, and I don't really know how it may act."

They all stood back.

The mounted train wreckers came on at the best speed their horses could show, and were now about as near to the wagon as Frank cared to have them come.

Frank pulled the string, and down came the hammer.

Crash—boom!

The piece had been sighted by the young inventor, and adjusted to a point calculated to hurl a ball along about three feet or so above the ground.

It discharged correctly, and did not budge from its rest.

"Shut off steam," cried Frank.

Charley Gorse did so, and as the team slackened its pace they all rushed to the rear of the wagon.

The ball just reached the troop, and laid out three in succession who barred its path, and then the mixture within the shell exploded with terrific force.

The portions of the fractured ball flew right and left, wounding or killing on all sides, bringing the troop to a confused halt, men swearing and yelling, horses rearing, plunging, and snorting, and trampling upon the fallen men and steeds, altogether creating a scene of the very wildest disorder.

"Give it to 'em, Frank," cried Gorse. "Don't let them recover their wits. Remember, anybody might better have pity on a dog than on these men who live only by murdering and plundering."

Frank needed no urging, and in less than a minute after the first discharge the cannon was loaded, sighted, and fired again.

"This is a solid shot!" announced the young leader.

And it performed its work in a very solid manner.

It was well aimed, and struck in about the center of the confused lot of men and horses.

It cut a terrible path through the close ranks, carrying death wherever it went, and so demoralized the now badly frightened robbers that they extricated themselves as speedily as possible from the struggling mass, and, in great disorder, sped back towards the train.

They left fully twenty of their men lying on the ground, some killed, some wounded by either shot or shell, and a number maimed by kicks received from the plunging horses.

"After them, Charley," said Frank, "turn around and pursue them. Pomp, I look to you to see that everything is loaded; and now I'll put on my suit of armor and be prepared to drive through bullets."

Out came his trunk from under the seat, and he produced a complete suit of armor, made with his own hands, and composed of closely woven chains of steel.

It was a trifle heavy, but the air could circulate through it, and that made it just as cool as ordinary clothing.

The entire front of the helmet was one network of interlacing bars of finely tempered steel.

Frank got into this suit, drew on a pair of gauntlets covered with steel scales, and then clambered up to his seat, and Charley Gorse gladly got down into the body of the wagon, for they were now nearing the cars, and became targets for the infuriated wreckers.

The party that Frank had routed with his cannon had joined the others, and when it was seen how the rascals had been cut up, an angry roar arose from the murderous horde.

The panned up people in the cars, who had kept the wreckers at bay by volleys from their

revolvers, saw that aid was coming to them, and some of them threw up the windows and fired shot after shot at the wreckers.

"Fire away, boys!" cried Charley Gorse, and as Frank charged down upon the enemy, his cousin, the darkey, and Barney Shea, began to pour in a very destructive fire from their repeating rifles, using the movable port-holes that Frank had constructed in the sides of his bullet-proof wagon.

Frank ran up within a hundred yards of the train, and then wheeled his Team and dashed away on a little detour.

A storm of bullets were fired by the wreckers; they rattled harmlessly from the sides of the wagon, and fully twenty recoiled from Frank's suit of mail.

Just as Frank wheeled the Team, a loud whistle pierced the air.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A TERRIBLE SLAUGHTER.

THE engineer, after regaining his much cherished locomotive, had said that he would follow after Frank, and he did so until within a half a mile of the cars.

Then he halted his engine, and seeing that the Team was running away from the cars, pursued by the wreckers, he concluded that it would not be safe for him to approach just then.

There he remained until he saw Frank pursuing the broken band back to the cars, and he made up his mind that the young genius meant business.

"Now I may be able to help," muttered the engineer.

He started the engine, keeping his hand on the lever, and looking ahead over the tender.

It will be remembered by the reader that the engine was running backwards.

The engineer had kept up a good force of steam, and now the locomotive plunged over the prairie at a rate that lent tremendous force to such a heavily constructed machine.

As he neared the cars the engineer saw that his course would bring him into the midst of the wreckers.

This suited his purpose. Frank was whirling the Team here and there, and in order to avoid a possible collision, the engineer blew his whistle.

Frank heard it, saw the on-coming monster, and steered his Team out of the way.

At the very highest speed that could be produced under the circumstances, the engine rushed upon the yelling train-wreckers.

These latter heard the whistle, saw the engine, and with a lively appreciation of their danger they tried hard to get away.

But only a few succeeded in getting clear of this novel enemy.

He was going towards the cars, and did not want to smash into them, so the engineer shut off steam, calculating that the impetus gained by the machine would accomplish his idea.

And he was right.

The heavy tender, backed by the much heavier locomotive, smashed into the confused mixture of men and horses, cutting a deadly pathway with a force that was irresistible.

Horses were knocked aside like a bunch of papers in a gale of wind; men flew up into the air like balls whirled from the hands of a juggler.

Weapons flew right and left, also, and for a brief moment the air seemed full of vaulting forms, knives and pistols, rifles, hats, and various other articles knocked from the hands of the terribly punished train-wreckers.

Strong men were hurled prostrate to the ground, and crushed under the wheels of the juggernaut that was dealing death and destruction as it pushed its awful way through the living barrier.

It was a most terrible spectacle, and Frank Reade stopped his team short, and gazed upon the scene with the most intense interest.

Never in his life had he seen men crushed and mangled in numbers by anything as this locomotive was doing.

The heavy machine swept on, and left a track

marked with its score or more of victims, some dead, a number wounded, and some so terribly mangled that they prayed for death to release them from their agony.

Of course this had created the most widespread confusion in the ranks of the train-wreckers, and when the locomotive stopped within twenty yards of the cars, the engineer saw that he had demoralized the enemy.

"Come out, passengers," he yelled, to the inmates of the cars. "Come out and give it to them."

And he leaped down from his now blood-sprinkled cab, ready to lead the attack.

Without hesitation the men poured forth from the cars, each man with a revolver in his hand, and to the number of fifty or sixty they ran up to the engineer.

At the same moment Frank Reade drove his team close up, and Pomp and Charley began banging away once more.

With a wild Irish yell Barney Shea leaped from the wagon, armed with his shillelah.

"Hooroo!" he shouted. "It's meself that's the gossoon for close quarters!"

And in his usual slap-dash style the reckless fellow rushed alone upon the train-wreckers, and began striking left and right.

"Git forninst me," he would yell, "and be the powers yez'll get a dose from me blackthorn sthick that'll kape yez from headaches for a divilish long toime."

The wreckers were trying to extricate themselves from the struggling mass of men and horses overthrown by the engine, but some of them turned upon the wild Irishman, and he certainly would have been killed had not the people from the train rushed up at that moment, and poured in a galling fire at short range from their revolvers.

Then Charley and Pomp jumped down from the wagon, and rushed to the aid of their comrade.

Barney was in his element, and with sweeping blows he laid around him right and left, talking all the time like a chatterbox.

"Take that, you omadhann; how does that fit yer gob, ye daylight thafe? That's for you, ye long-nosed haythin; arrah, and I've made a wreck o' that wrecker, so I have. Me compliments wid this, ye black-muzzled robber, sure and I've extraxtracted yer front teeth better nor the finest dintist in the land, and be me sowl, I'll not charge ye a ha'porth for the job."

And so he rattled on, talking to every man he assailed.

But the train-wreckers had got a great deal more than they had bargained for, and being thoroughly disheartened and badly cut up, they were in no mood to carry on a battle which was now rather one-sided, and with all possible haste they made off, spurring their poor, frightened steeds in order to get away as speedily as possible from the storm of bullets.

The mounted ones thus got away, but the ones on foot, to the number of about twelve or fifteen, were left behind.

These latter were immediately riddled with bullets, the incensed passengers pouring in a volley upon them that knocked over every man.

At the same moment a shrill, prolonged whistle was heard, and another train could be observed a few miles away, coming along the track.

"There," cried Frank, "you must look to the other train to set you right. I'm going to pursue those fellows who are on horseback. Jump aboard, boys, and we'll chase them."

"Do," cried Barney, as he leaped into the wagon, "and have the nateness, if ye plase, to make them shtop, while I have another shindy wid them."

"Anything to oblige you," said Frank, who looked like a king of ancient times in his armor. Pomp and Charley followed Shea, and Frank shouted:

"Good-bye, folks."

"Good-bye," was shouted back, and then three hearty cheers went up from the grateful passengers.

Then, with one last glance at the bloody battle-field, strewn with the wounded and the dead, Frank pulled the reins, and the Steam Team

darted away in pursuit of the fugitive train-wreckers.

"Altogether," said Charley Gorse, "that was the greatest slaughter that ever I saw in my life in so short a time. They must have numbered over a hundred when they threw that train from the track, and I'll wager they don't count as many by half at the present moment."

"It was terrible," said the professor, who was a man of peace.

"Begorra, and it was a most illegant picnie, so it was," said Shea. "Arrah, and would yez moind how the thaves run? Jist look at them."

The mounted men had a good start of the Steam Team, but Frank rapidly overhauled them.

The wreckers rushed past a little grove, and Frank was guiding his team past, when a man rushed from the midst of the trees, and yelled:

"Professor—professor!"

Professor Smith, who was standing up in the wagon, heard the cry, turned and saw his traveling companion, George Augustus Fitznoodle.

"Fitznoodle!" yelled out Barney, Frank and Charley, in concert, and then the form of a brawny Indian squaw came flying out from the trees.

It was the Widow Shobbusguy, and she caught Fitznoodle by the collar, and very quickly hauled him back into the shady grove, Fitznoodle yelling for help.

Frank pulled up.

"I'll save him!" he said.

## CHAPTER X.

### RESCUING FITZNOODLE.

"You're going to rescue Fitznoodle?" asked Charley Gorse.

"Yes, and alone," said Frank Reade. "I think I can do it, and I'm going to try."

With very deliberate movements, for the armor was a trifle heavy for his slight frame, Frank got down from the seat into the body of the wagon.

"Now," he said, "the fact that a squaw ran out from the grove and collared Fitznoodle proves that he has been captured, and, of course, there are a number of Indians in among the trees. I saw several forms flitting back and forth, myself. If we made a charge into the grove we might get away with them, and they might as likely kill any of us. But I think I can work the thing alone."

"How?" demanded Gorse.

"I'll show you," said Frank. "Please open that drawer marked with the letter 'E.'"

Charley did so, and exposed to view two small pocket-batteries, with fine wires attached.

These were handed to Frank, and he at once removed one of his steel gloves and unlatched a portion of his suit of metal.

Seeing first that the little batteries were fully charged, he placed them in his pockets, the wires running out through small holes especially made for them.

These wires, being thin and pliable, were easily twisted around the arms of the young genius, and the natural result was that his entire suit was covered with an invisible but quite powerful flood of electricity, but, of course, his clothing prevented him from receiving any shock.

Then he requested Charley to take his whip from the drawer.

The whip was constructed entirely of fine wire, twisted together, and ran to an extremely slender point from a rather heavy butt.

This Frank grasped with his glove of steel, and announced himself as ready for business.

The fugitive train-wreckers had taken advantage of this delay to gallop out of sight.

Not a sound came from the grove, and not a form was seen.

In all probability, and so reasoned our friends, the occupants of the grove were staring in wonder at the Steam Team from behind the trunks of the trees.

"Here goes," said Frank. "Good-bye, old friend, for I may never see you again."

And he held out his hand to Barney, covered with the steel glove.

Innocently enough, the big-hearted Irishman grasped it with his own hard but naked fist.

But he didn't keep hold.

He scarcely touched it, and then let it drop like a hot plate.

He danced up and down like a toy figure.

"Murderer and Irish! tare and 'ouns!—och, me hand—me hand! Worra, but it's that same devil's own whisky that ye dhrink through yer fingers. Oh, howly smoke, will I ever go home?"

The others laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks to see poor Barney dance and hear him howl.

The foolish fellow had received quite a severe shock, which Frank could have made more powerful by grasping Barney's hand, or else by touching him with both steel gloves at one time.

"That was merely an experiment, and I am quite satisfied with the power of my little batteries," said Frank, as he ceased laughing. "You only got a mere touch. I expect to give some innocent red-skin the full force of the two batteries in a few minutes, and then you can laugh."

"Begob, and ye've rattled all the laugh o' o' me bones," groaned Barney. "The devil's whisky don't agree wid me."

Frank carefully clambered down from the wagon to the ground.

"Don't be alarmed, and come in rushing after me if you hear a row," said the genius.

"Remember that I am proof against lead or steel, and I'm able to take care of myself. However, if I don't return within fifteen or twenty minutes, then you may hunt me up."

"All right," said Gorse. "Good luck to you."

Frank waved his whip and started for the grove.

In about three minutes he entered a cluster of trees, and looked through the lattice of steel to discover the people he knew to be there.

Crash—bang—crash!

And the first positive proof he got that they were still there was a volley from guns and pistols, the balls from which rattled and pattered like big hail-stones against his suit, and then fell harmlessly to the ground.

The force of so many bullets striking against him was sufficient to make Frank stagger, but in a moment he had regained his balance.

He saw a number of braves arise up from behind the bushes and stalk forth from the trees, and they all held their weapons in their hands and looked at him as though they expected to see him drop.

Frank strode towards them, and they began to jabber out some words of astonishment.

The young rescuer caught sight of Fitznoodle.

The latter was reclining under a big bush, held in subjection by the keen and threatening eye of the lovely Widow Shobbusguy.

One glance at Momser assured the young genius that he was the chief of the band, and he advanced straight to him.

Momser regarded him with a stare of wonder. The suit of mail was a puzzler for him.

Moreover, having failed to kill Frank with a volley, he felt a trifle shaky when the latter approached him.

In the most friendly style imaginable Frank Reade bowed.

Not to be outdone in politeness, Momser awkwardly returned the bow.

Then Frank extended both hands, with the evident intention of shaking, and Momser, not knowing what else to do, followed suit.

The young genius closed down upon the red-skin's fingers with his gloves of steel.

And he gripped the chief's fingers as hard as possible.

"Ugh! whoop—yah!" yelled Momser, in terrific alarm, as he got the benefit of the full electric power, and he made a big leap straight up into the air, trying to break loose, but Frank held on with a firm grip.

Of course Momser was much heavier than Frank, but the latter was well weighted down by the complete suit of armor, and that enabled him to keep on his feet while the chief was trying to break away.

Thunder! how poor Momser did jump and shout, kick and yell, and all the time the streams of electricity were going through him like liquid fire.

Suddenly he became twisted up and fell to the ground.

Frank let go of him, and poor Momser kicked and bawled, and rolled over the ground without hindrance.

The other Indians were astounded at this novel performance.

Frank thought he might be able to get Fitznoodle away during this season of surprise.

He strode up to the spot where poor Fitznoodle crouched under the eye of the Widow Shobbusguy.

"I am Frank Reade," he said. "Rise and follow me!"

"Frank Reade!" cried the astonished and delighted cockney; "why, h'I was just 'oping and praying for you to turn h'up, h'and, be'old, 'ere you h'are."

And with alacrity he got upon his feet.

"You no leave Shobbusguy," said the widow, catching him by the arm; "you stay."

"Sorry," politely said Fitznoodle, "but h'I must leave you. H'I h'am h'always at the command of the fair sex, but when they're h'off color—"

"Come on," growled Frank.

"You no go!" fiercely snarled the very plucky widow, and she seized George Augustus by the ankle and tried her best to pull him over.

At the same moment she opened her lips, evidently with the intention of shouting out an appeal to the rather demoralized warriors, when, with a most dexterous motion, Frank Reade suddenly thrust the little end of the wire whip into the squaw's wide-open mouth.

The effect was instantaneous.

The entire current of electricity ran down the whip and touched the squaw's tongue, giving her an intensely powerful shock.

She gave one unearthly howl, and then fell back upon the ground.

Not a sound escaped her after her head struck the ground, for she was totally unconscious.

Frank withdrew his powerful little weapon, and walked away, George Augustus at his heels.

But by this time Momser was on his feet again, and a trifle more angry than scared.

He made a blind rush at Frank, and some of his men followed him.

As the chief ran at Frank, the latter slashed at him with the whip.

The slender wire coiled about Momser's neck, and once more he got a dose of electricity that made him feel as though his head was being taken off.

He dropped again, and all but two of his men turned back when they saw him fall.

These two fellows Frank caught in his steel-clad arms, and, as they were about half-naked, they got shocked in a manner that took every bit of fight out of them, and chilled their courage with a new and nameless terror, for they hadn't the remotest idea about such a thing as electricity.

Frank released them, and they ran howling after their comrades.

The young genius looked around for Fitznoodle.

That gentleman had discreetly got away, and could now be seen making good time towards the Steam Team.

"This is a victory of science over the matters of brute strength and numbers, and I think I shall keep fighting on this line," said Frank, and walked out of the grove in triumph.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE TREASURE-BOX.

To return to Black Jack.

Had the leader of the outlaws been allowed to travel straight away from Reefer's Bluff with his plunder, in all probability he would have conducted his band twenty-five or thirty miles away from the village before camping for the night, but Frank Reade had made that impossible.

When pursued by the Steam Team, the band ran a number of miles from the village, and when the outlaws, in turn, became pursuers, part of the distance was recovered.

In short, though being harassed by the Steam Team, wounded by Pomp with the wonderful rifle, and having their horses jaded by unlooked-for work, the prairie bandits found it impossible to get away from the grove into which they had been driven.

"Curse the luck," growled the leader, as he surveyed wounded men and also wounded horses. "Here I've lost a number of good men, and am forced to stay here in this grove until morning, and all on account of a kid with some cursed new-fangled steam contrivance. Oh, if I only had him here for a moment!"

And the amiable land pirate closed and opened his dirty hand in a way that was very suggestive of the sort of treatment Frank Reade was likely to receive from him.

"Bring me that box," he called out to one of his men.

The treasure-box constructed by John Gall was brought to him.

"In this," he said, looking with very evident respect at the box, "is concealed all the money that those fools have been saving up ever since the first house was put up at Reefer's Bluff, and now it belongs to us. How am I to get into it?"

He turned the box over and over. Not even a key-hole of any sort could he find. There were a number of polished round knobs protruding on all sides of the box, looking like large rivets, but he could discover nothing that looked like an opening.

"Thundering curious," he muttered, and he went at it again.

No use—he could discover no opening of any sort.

"Curse the thing, I'll smash it," angrily roared Black Jack.

But 'twas easier said than done, as he very soon found out.

One of the red-skins he had with him handed the incensed captain a sharp steel hatchet, and Black Jack pounded away at the box.

As well might he have hammered at the anvil on which John Gall had very probably constructed it.

Growing furious with his failures, he struck harder than ever, and one of his terrific blows caused the hatchet to fly into several pieces.

Some of the men laughed, and more of them swore, but laughing or swearing, it was all the same. They could not open the treasure-box.

Black Jack broke out into a horrible stream of profanity.

"Why, curse my eyes!" he cried, "this is like the story of the man who saw the valley of gold from the top of a hill, and couldn't get down there. Here we've got probably a hundred thousand dollars, mostly in bonds, in that box, and can't handle the cash."

"Wait until we get somewhere where we can smash it with a sledge," said one of his best men, a sort of second in command, named Marco.

"I'll find some way of managing the cursed thing," growled the irritated leader.

"But is there as much money in the box as you say?" asked Marco.

He was a Spaniard, this Marco, a tall, dark man, treacherous and cruel, and as fierce as a wild beast.

"Of course there is," said the other. "My information came all right. I know to a certainty that John Gall has got either a hundred bonds, or else a hundred bank-notes of a thousand dollars each in this box. And he's likely got a few extra thousands, too."

Marco said nothing more, but with a long glance at the valuable box, he strode away.

It was fully decided that they could not go on until morning, so after looking to the horses and those of the band that were wounded, the men lounged around the grove in idle mood, telling stories, singing and cursing, gambling and amusing themselves variously.

Marco, the Spaniard, might have been seen going around to several of the men, one at a time, and indulging in a short conversation, which was carried on in a low tone.

The evening came on, and supper was cooked for the band.

With the goods stolen from the village they feasted in good style.

After the meal was over the Spaniard approached the leader.

"Captain," said he, "let me have one trial at the box."

"No," shortly spoke up Black Jack. "We'll wait till we get to our retreat."

"I'm not going to wait."

"Eh, what's that?"

"I'm not going to wait!" repeated the Spaniard.

Several of the men heard the loudly-spoken words, and crowded near to the speakers.

Much surprised at the manner of one who had been quite a favorite with him, Black Jack slowly got upon his feet.

"What the devil do you mean—Marco, are you crazy?"

"Not at all," said Marco. "There is a hundred thousand dollars or more in that box. I haven't been in a city to have a good racket in two years, and there's lots of the boys in the same condition. We want some of that money, and we're going to have it, and start off for a good time."

"Indeed?" growled the leader. "And how do you propose to get it?"

"Well, I've asked for it," said Marco.

"I refuse to give it. What now?"

"We'll have it anyhow," sulkily said the Spaniard.

"Come and take it," said Black Jack, in a defiant tone.

Several of his men ran to his side as he pronounced these words, but an almost equally large number clustered around Marco.

"Ah!" cried Marco. "You see that I have got as much power in this band as yourself."

"I do," said Black Jack. "It is the result of treachery, but I know how to meet it. Men, listen to me."

They were all silent.

"My men," said the leader, "you appear to be about equally divided for Marco and me. Two men can't rule this band, and for the two factions to fight it out would be the means of killing half of you."

"To prevent this, and to keep the band entire, I will fight with this man who disputes my rule. Whichever wins the battle rules the band."

"Good—good!" yelled the men.

"That's fair."

"Yes, that's the way."

"Marco," said Black Jack, "I could have shot you down. I have given you a chance for your life. You know how to use the knife you wear in your belt; draw!"

And out came his own glittering weapon, flashing in the bright and far-reaching light of the big camp fire.

"I'm agreeable," said the Spaniard.

He drew his knife.

The two men faced each other, their eyes flashing with hate.

Clash!

The steel blades met, and the sparks flew in a shower.

Cut and slash, at it they went, both watching for a chance to stab.

Two slight stabs were given and taken on both sides, and then the Spaniard parried a heavy thrust made by the captain, and dropped on one knee, as though forced off his balance.

It was a mere design. With a swift movement he made an upward thrust at Black Jack's stomach.

Black Jack uttered a cry, and then staggered back.

The Spaniard leaped up, rushed upon him, and was about to stab him again, when the captain fell heavily to the ground.

The Spaniard tossed his knife high into the air.

"Victory!" he cried, and then made a rush towards the spot where the captain had fallen, right on top of the treasure-box. "Now the money is mine!"

"No!" cried a ringing voice, "the money is mine!"

A tall form leaped from behind a tree, a club hummed through the air, and the victorious Marco was felled to the ground by a man who hastily snatched the metallic box from under the form of the fallen captain.

It was John Gall, the blacksmith!

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE THREE STRANGERS.

WHEN Frank Reade reached the wagon, Fitznoodle was already there, shaking hands with Charley Gorse, and drinking Barney Shea's whisky.

"Be the piper that played afore Moses, I'm glad to see you," cried Barney, as he received back the pocket-flask, and put it to his own lips. "Ye bloody Britisher, ye've drunk every drop."

"Just think h'of the h'exertion h'of running h'all that way," said George Augustus. "'Ow h'are you, professor?"

"Quite well, thank you," said Smith. "But after our extensive travels, Mr. Fitznoodle, we find ourselves far from the haunts of civilization, and with no means of traveling."

"H'oh, that's h'all right," confidently said Fitznoodle; "h'I shall stay with Frank for the present, h'and you can do the same."

"Certainly," said Frank. "How are you, old boy?"

And they had a real hearty shake of hands, which resulted in Fitznoodle turning up his heels, prancing like a skittish horse, bawling like a dog, and twisting himself double.

"H'oh, h'oh, h'I h'am a goner now," shouted the Cockney, dropping down upon the plain in an agitated heap. "My blood h'is h'all on fire."

The rest of the party laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks.

"My gracious!" cried Frank, "I forgot all about the electricity. You don't know how sorry I am."

"But h'i can h'imagine," mournfully said Fitznoodle, and by the expression on his face he did not place much faith in Frank's protestation of sorrow.

The latter then explained to his comrades the manner of the rescue.

"I left them running," he said, "and I'm not afraid that they'll trouble us. Give me a lift, Pomp."

Pomp assisted him to remove his suit of mail, which was carefully stowed away in its proper place.

"Now," said the young leader, "what is the next thing to do? Shall we pursue those train-wreckers, or shall we hunt Black Jack?"

"The train wreckers you can't very well follow," said Charley, "for the reason that you can't see them. Frank, do you know that I've just made a discovery?"

"What?"

"Do you see that other grove, beyond the one you just left?"

"Yes."

"That is where Black Jack and his band took refuge. If it was full daylight I might be able, with the aid of the glass, to see whether they were over there still."

It was beginning to grow dusky on the plain, and objects at a distance were becoming indistinct.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Frank; "I'll see to my team, and examine and oil all parts well, fix my electric light, and then we'll take a night cruise. I want to try my light. While running around I'll get close to that grove yonder, and a shot will no doubt discover whether they are there or not."

"All right," said Gorse, and assisted him to examine all the different parts, both of the machinery and the running portion.

Frank looked into the water-tank and found his supply running low.

"That's bad," he said. "Fitznoodle, was there a spring in the grove where you were?"

"No, not h'any."

"Then," said Frank, "my best plan will be to stop at the first grove I happen to sight and endeavor to lay in a good supply, if possible."

"Devil the sthep will the horses go for ye widout drhinking," said Shea.

"All aboard," said Reade.

The night was now closing in, and Frank turned on the electric light.

The brilliant blaze shot forth in a bright stream from the eyes of the Steam Team, showing a light that rendered objects perfectly plain at the distance of half a mile or more.

"That's splendid," said Gorse.

"Wif dat ar light, an' de long range gun dat Massa Frank am got, dis chile kin kill jes' de same at night as in de daytime," said Pomp.

Away they started over the plain, and Frank felt very proud as he drove his team.

He sighted a large grove after dashing along for about fifteen minutes, and directed his team towards it, with the hope of finding water to replenish his tanks.

In a few minutes he reached the grove, and at once shut off his light, so as not to waste the electricity.

Then he made a discovery.

A large fire was blazing in the grove, which was very conclusive evidence that it was occupied.

"Halloo! who is here?" he cried.

"Caution," cried Charley, seizing his rifle.

"Rest easy," said a pleasant voice. "We are white men, like yourselves, and if you are honest men then we'll like you also."

The speaker stepped forth from behind a tree, and two others immediately did the same.

"We are merely three travelers out upon the plains for amusement," said the one who had spoken. "What sort of a queer machine do you call this?"

"This is the Steam Team. I am the inventor and driver, and this is my party," said Frank.

"Is there any water here?"

"Plenty; two springs."

"Then I'll take some."

"Have you had supper?" asked another of the men, as the rest of Frank's party followed his lead and jumped down to the ground.

"Divil the sup," said Barney.

"Then have some with us. I found a buffalo in the grove when I came in, and I shot him. We've just had a few steaks, and they're fine."

"All right," said Frank. "We'll have some of your steaks with pleasure. Pomp, I'll attend to the water, and you attend to the meat."

"All right, sah."

They all moved into the grove, and approached the camp fire blazing in the center.

Frank took a look at the three men.

They were all nicely dressed, and had the appearance of gentlemen out upon the plains for sport.

Their horses were all tethered close at hand, and it was evident that the little party had just finished their supper. They were middle-aged, and very respectable in appearance.

Frank had no idea that they were aught else than gentlemen hunters, such as are often found on the plains.

When he was filling up his tanks they walked around the wagon and Team, and expressed their admiration of the invention.

"And how fast can they go?" asked one of the men.

"Oh, I could make them go at sixty miles an hour," said Frank.

"What is your average speed?"

"About thirty-five miles an hour, when the wind is not too strong."

"What, with a load?"

"Oh, yes, the Team can do that and pull a few tons."

"Wonderful!" was the comment. "How do you apply the power?"

And then, with pardonable pride, the young genius showed them all the different points of the invention, the way of applying and cutting off the steam power, the use of the light, the manner of steering, and, in fact, all that could be told.

They thanked him, and then strolled away to where their horses stood, and pretended to be examining the knots that secured the animals.

While engaged in this, the man who had first addressed Frank spoke in a low tone to his comrades:

"Well, boys, what do you think?"

"I think that it would be just exactly the cheese for us."

"So do I. We could make night trips from the factory to the nearest city, and carry our 'queer' to the 'shovers' without any danger. Even if the Washington chaps got on our track we could snap our fingers at them, for they never could catch us."

"True."

"I propose that we collar it."

"I'm agreed."

"So am I."

"When shall we do it?"

"In a few minutes, while they are at their supper. I think I understand the contrivance pretty well now, and could run it as well as this Frank Reade. By the way, that reminds me that this same bit of a boy helped Detective Hall to clean out Captain Prime's gang a few years ago. You want to look out for him, for he's a little wonder."

"He killed my brother when he smashed Prime's gang," said one of the three, in a savage tone. "I'd like to put a bullet through his heart."

"Don't do anything to jeopardize our scheme," said the first speaker. "If we can work this thing right we can be sure of making our fortune, and laughing at the Secret Service men."

"They're sitting down to supper now," put in the other. "Let's light our pipes and stroll around until we think our chance has come."

They moved away from the horses, filled and lit their pipes, and strolled around in an aimless manner, while Frank and his friends were devouring the toothsome steaks.

From the conversation between the three men, the reader has no doubt inferred that they were members of a gang of counterfeiters, and that they designed stealing and running away with the Steam Team.

Certainly it would have been a most valuable possession for men in that unlawful business.

The rascals kept on smoking, moving in an apparently aimless manner about the grove, and gradually converging in a quiet way towards the spot where stood the Team.

Frank had put fuel on the fire, and steam was up to a good point, ready for a start.

At length, just when Barney was in the middle of a rollicking Irish story, the three men slipped quietly out of the grove.

It must have happened that in the faint starlight the man who proposed to act as driver got hold of the string that ran to the noses of the Team instead of the reins, at first, for just as Frank was laughing heartily at the story he was brought to his feet by the shrill neighing of his metal steeds.

He noted the absence of the strangers, and with an apprehensive cry he dashed to the edge of the grove.

"My God!" he cried. "They've run off with my Steam Team!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BULLETS OF FIRE.

It would be hard to describe Frank Reade's feelings, when he rushed to the edge of the grove, and saw the Steam Team moving away.

Pomp was right behind him, rifle in hand, and ready to shoot; but the darkness of the night was in favor of the thieves, and although the large and bulky wagon could be plainly seen, it was not so easy to see so small an object as a man.

But Frank Reade was prepared for such an emergency.

He drew a revolver from his pocket, and presented it toward the retreating wagon.

This revolver was just the same as any other revolver of large caliber, but the cartridges were made expressly for the weapon by Frank.

The pistol contained seven chambers, and one, on which the hammer rested, was always empty; the other chambers were loaded, alternately, with regular cartridges, bullet and all, and cartridges of Frank's designing.

These latter contained balls of combustible

chemical powder instead of bullets, which were thrown out just the same as a bullet when the pistol was fired.

These balls lasted from five to ten seconds, and burned with an intensely brilliant white light.

Frank raised this night pistol, pressed the trigger, and sent a bright ball of flame after the wagon.

The chemical light illumined the scene with the brightness of day, and as it went sailing over the Steam Team, Frank pressed the trigger again, for he had caught sight of one of the men, plainly revealed by the ball of fire.

The revolver was a self-cocking one, and therefore, with the weapon raised, it was an easy matter to draw a bead and fire while the blazing ball still careened in the air.

Frank's aim was true. By the expiring light of the blazing sphere, he, and the rest of his party, saw one of the men tumble from the wagon.

This took about four seconds, altogether. But still the Steam Team was rushing away at pretty good speed, and rapidly leaving the vicinity of the grove.

Frank saw the man tumble, but he did not pause an instant.

Crack went the revolver again. Another blazing sphere careened over the still receding wagon, and then another one of the leaden bullets carried destruction to a second member of the fraudulent trio.

Frank kept on, but his next flying torch fell far short of the wagon.

"Two of them knocked over," shouted Charley Gorse.

"Yes," gloomily said Frank, "and the third one has got away with my Steam Team."

"What shall we do?"

"Worra—worra, and it's meself that wants to know what *can* we do."

"Hit's certainly h'annoying to 'ave such a thing 'appen," said Fitznoodle.

With a rumbling sound that grew less and less each instant, the Steam Team passed beyond view.

"Gentlemen," said the professor, "I am a man of peace, but in this affair I might advise."

"What can you advise?" demanded Frank, who felt decidedly out of temper.

"That you follow the team," suggested the professor.

"What, on foot?"

"No, with the horses that they have so considerably left you."

"By Jove! not one of us ever thought of the horses," said Charley, and they made a rush towards the spot where the horses were tethered.

Here a new difficulty arose.

There were but three horses, and with the professor and Fitznoodle left out of the case, there were four persons wanted to ride—Pomp, Barney, Charley and Frank.

"I'm going," said Frank. "I must go after my property."

And he jumped on the back of one horse.

"I've sworn to stick to you," remarked Charley Gorse, and then he jumped on the second horse.

"H'I would cheerfully h'offer my services, but, h'as you h'all know, h'I h'am not a distinguished 'orseman, h'and h'in this h'extreme darkness—"

"Clar de track!" yelled Pomp, and with more haste than grace he whirled poor Fitznoodle aside, and leaped upon the back of the third horse.

"Musha, and are yez going to lave me behind?" yelled Shea.

"Yes," roared Gorse.

"You've got your fiddle," said Frank, and then he led the pursuit, dashing away on the back of the strange horse, "and we'll not be long."

And then they were gone.

"Worra—worra, the mane devils," groaned the wild Irishman, "they're going off after foightin', and lavin' me behoid thim like a gossoon. Be the powers, I'll soon be gittin' rusty, so I will."

"H'at this h'interesting h'epoch," said

George Augustus, "let h'us h'endeavor to while h'away the time h'as pleasantly h'as possible, h'untill the return h'of h'our friends. You can play on the violin—"

"Fiddle, ye mane?"

"H'exactly. H'I can sing a very decent sort h'of a song, h'and the professor—"

"I can furnish some very beautiful lectures on the inner surface of the daffodil; and a magnificent treatise on the human ear," gravely said the professor.

"Then," said Fitznoodle, "we certainly can 'ave a very pleasant time."

"Oh, illigant as blazes," said Barney, and he raised his fiddle from the place where it rested.

"Shall I shtart?"

"Certainly," said Fitznoodle, and Shea rattled off a lively jig, which made even the staid professor feel like shaking his foot.

While Barney was fiddling away in his vigorous, noisy style, Professor Smith was cooking another piece of buffalo at the fire.

Had any one of the little party taken the trouble to look around them, they might have become aware of the fact that several pairs of eyes were fixed upon them during the time that Barney was playing.

"It's your turn now, Fitznoodle!" said the professor, turning the buffalo steak with great care.

"All right," said George Augustus, totally unconscious of the fact that he was the observed of many observers. "I'll sing you 'The Death h'of Nelson.'"

"And I kin play it wid ye," said Shea, who happened to know the song, and he played a sort of prelude.

Then Fitznoodle sang the first verse of the song in really fine style, and received a round of applause from a score of hands, and was rewarded with shouts of:

"Bully boy."

"He's a nightingale."

"Bully for the Britisher."

"Clap him again."

And another clapping of hands then followed.

Barney stopped playing, Fitznoodle's knees knocked together, and Smith allowed the buffalo steak to fall into the fire.

About twenty men, all hard-featured, rough-looking fellows, walked from behind the trees and bushes, and advanced towards the camp-fire.

After them followed half a dozen women, as coarse, hard-featured, and brutal-looking as the men who preceded them.

"Friends or foes?" yelled Shea, dropping his fiddle and clutching his trusty blackthorn stick.

"Friends, of course," answered one, who appeared to be the leader. "Why, we've been your audience for the last ten minutes. Didn't we give you good applause?"

"Dade an' yer did," said Barney. "But how kin ye here?"

"We got here on foot," was the rather odd reply. "We're looking for three men, but you are not the parties."

"Arrah, and are yez looking for the three omadhauns that we found in this same grove? All min wid hair over their mugs?"

"Yes."

"Thin I kin inform ye that the daylight thaves wint off wid our coach, and the devil only knows when they'll be back again."

"We'll wait an' see," said the leader. "And while we're waiting we'll have a rippin' old dance."

"Hurrah!" yelled the men.

"Bully!" shouted the women.

"Ow very h'immodist h'on the part h'of the members h'of the female sex," said George Augustus.

"What do yer say?" shouted one of the women, and she gave the poor Briton a back-handed blow in the stomach that doubled Fitznoodle up. "Jis' you say that I ain't a lady and I'll lay you out stiffer than starch, you slab-sided sardine."

Which certainly proved that she was a perfect lady.

George Augustus was indignant, but didn't

dare say anything. In fact, the woman hadn't left him breath enough to utter a word.

Barney Shea recognized the fact that he was surrounded with a very hard lot, and he had reason to fear their brutal anger if he refused to entertain them.

So he rattled off another of his lively tunes.

The men grabbed hold of the women very unceremoniously, and formed a set.

In two minutes they were dancing something that was a mixture of the lancers and quadrille, with a bit of polka, and plenty of skips and jumps thrown in.

"Time!" cried the leader, who was one of the most enthusiastic dancers, and stopping the dance for a moment, he ran up to Barney.

"Swig at that, pard," he said, and handed the Irishman a flask.

Barney took a big drink. It was really fine whisky, and so he took another big drink.

"Now go it!" cried the leader, and he took a swig at the flask.

The whisky was old and strong, and it warmed Barney up.

He began fiddling away at a fast and furious rate.

The leader dropped his flask, and it rolled towards Professor Smith.

The latter picked it up, smelled of its contents, and then looked around him on all sides.

He had "sworn off," but he dearly loved whisky. Nobody was looking, and so he raised the flask to his lips. It tasted so good that he drank every drop.

In just exactly three minutes he was crazy drunk, and two minutes later he was in the midst of the dancers.

"I'm a revolving epitome!" he yelled, and he threw his long legs around in a way that was appalling.

Barney, too, became excited.

The whisky got into his head, and he couldn't restrain himself.

He had been sitting on a log, but he jumped up, and mixed with the dancers, fiddling away like mad.

"Worra, whist, now, but the thing's as good as a wake!" he yelled, jumping around like a cricket. "Give me room till I rattle me throaters."

He threw himself one way, the professor spun around another way, and the result was that one of the women got a kick in the eye.

She didn't know who kicked her, but she pulled a knife, and tackled the nearest man.

The dance was broken up; some went to help the man, some went to help the woman. They were all more or less drunk, and in less time than it takes to write, a general fight ensued.

Fitznoodle plucked up courage to pull Barney and the professor out of the row.

"Now h'is h'our chance to h'escape," said he, and they were sobered enough to see that he was right.

"Let's travel," said Barney, and with fiddle and shillelah he led the way out of the grove.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### HUNTING THE STEAM TEAM.

WHEN Frank, Charley, and the faithful Pomp dashed away on horseback in pursuit of the Steam Team, it was with a decidedly small chance of ever seeing young Reade's remarkable invention again.

The night was dark, very dark, and, of course, they could not see the team.

Moreover, they had no idea as to the course followed by the present driver, and had to trust to luck.

However, they spurred their horses on in a straight line.

"If he doesn't turn aside, we may yet catch up to him, for it's not likely that he'll keep on all night," said Frank.

For ten minutes or so they dashed on in silence.

No sign of the team.

"He's changed his course," said Frank Reade, "and we're probably riding farther away from him."

"No—no, look dar!" suddenly yelled out the darkey.

He pointed ahead, and slightly to the right hand.

They saw what he meant.

A brilliant flood of light was flashing out about a mile ahead, streaming out upon the plain like a burst of sunshine.

"There's the team," cried Frank. "After it, boys."

At the very best speed of their horses, they dashed on again.

But the light continued to move away to the right.

It maintained this course, and ere our friends had gone a quarter of a mile, the brilliant electric illumination was bearing full upon them.

"Halt!"

It was Frank Reade who uttered the sharp command.

They pulled up.

"Why, what in thunder is the matter with him?" demanded Charley, much puzzled by the eccentric course taken by the rascally driver of the Team.

"Something is the matter, either with the man or the Team, which is running around in a circle," said Frank. "Let us get out of the way."

They retreated a short distance and waited.

On came the Team, the electric light blazing out far ahead of them.

They were probably going at the rate of twenty miles an hour, and running in a perfect circle.

With a rumble and a whirr that made the horses prance, past them it went and spun away on the big ring that it was describing.

They all looked intently at the wagon as it hummed past, looking for the driver.

They could not see him.

"What can have become of him?" the young genius asked.

"Maybe he fell off," said Charley.

"Perhaps so," said Frank. "But what keeps the Team on this circle if no one guides them?" It certainly was puzzling, and they could not understand it.

They sat motionless on their horses, and waited for the machine to come around again.

It was describing about a mile circle, and within three minutes it dashed past them again.

No sign of the driver.

"Well, driver or no driver," said Frank Reade, "I want to get possession of my conveyance, and I don't want to stop here until its power runs out, and chance to let it smash against some obstacle."

"What are we to do?" demanded his cousin, who did not see the way for action very clearly.

"We have got one desperate chance for it," said Frank. "The machine is now describing a perfect circle. I saw that when it came around the second time it ran upon the track made by the first round. Let one of us get upon the shoulders of another, stand near to where it must pass, and leap into the wagon."

"Good," said Gorse.

"And dis chile am de kid to take dat ar jump," said Pomp, who was a splendid leaper. "Massa Frank, you kin hold de horses, dis coon kin git on Massa Charley's shoulders, and den de flog kin be did."

"Hang them," said Frank, "I don't like this circle business, because it's apt to strain the machinery. Be lively."

They leaped from their horses.

Frank took the bridle-reins of the animals, and retreated some distance from the course of the team.

The machine was coming on rapidly, and Charley and Pomp ran ahead as fast as they could to obtain the position they wanted.

Broad-shouldered Charley Gorse braced himself firmly, and the badly deformed black leaped lightly upon his back.

On came the team.

Frank, holding the horses in check, watched with anxious eyes for the result of the attempt.

If this failed the young genius was fearful that his machine would be damaged beyond repair, the power being so unevenly divided.

"The next time that I explain the workings of

my machinery to strangers, they are welcome to run away with the Team," he thought, bitterly, remembering that it was his own fault that the theft had been committed.

"Steady, dar!" yelled Pomp.

The instant had arrived.

Charley Gorse stood there as solid as a rock.

With a light, beautiful leap, Pomp launched his ungainly body through the air.

The black athletic landed safely in the body of the wagon.

As a natural consequence he rolled over and over two or three times, and then, clutching the sides, got upon his feet, and clutched at the seat.

And then he became suddenly aware of the fact that a man lay extended along the seat.

It was the last of the trio that had run away with the Team.

In the one brief instant that Pomp had a chance to look at him, he could see that the fellow was bleeding from a bullet wound in the head, and was glaring insanely.

The probable cause was this: One of the bullets from Frank Reade's night pistol, after passing through the living target aimed at by the young genius, had wounded the third one of the three villains.

This man, as he lay extended along the seat (his prostrate position was the secret of his invisibility), grasped the reins of the Team.

It would appear that he had grown delirious, and had thrown himself down on the seat, retaining both reins in his grasp, but pulling more on one rein than the other.

As Pomp touched him he raised up from the seat.

"Aha!" he yelled, in a frantic, half-delirious fashion, and clutching the negro he lifted him fairly up to the seat.

Pomp had no idea of allowing his enemy to get the best of him.

He threw his powerful arm about the form of the shouting thief, and endeavored to hurl him from the wagon.

The man clung to him as tightly as a leech to human flesh.

The seat was a very narrow and unsafe place for wrestling, but the situation did not admit of any choice.

"I'll tear your heart out!" hissed the half-crazy thief, and he clawed at Pomp's body as though he really meant to do it.

He was just enough out of his mind with the pain of his wound to prove an exceedingly tough customer to handle.

Back and forth on the driving seat they swayed.

"I'll squeeze de breff out ob de cussed fool, an' den he'll hab to gib in to dis chile!" cried Pomp, and with the words he concentrated all his strength in those long, black arms, and hugged the rascal until he could hear his bones crack. "Now, oberboard wif yer!" cried the black, and he raised the half-crushed thief in his arms.

The man did go overboard, but not in exactly the manner designed and intended by Pomp.

At the very instant that the darkey raised the white man in his strong arms, with the intention of hurling him aside, the wheels of the wagon struck some good-sized and very solid obstacle.

The result was just exactly what might be looked for, considering the insecure position of the men.

White man and darkey flew from the seat like rockets, and went tumbling to the plain.

And the Steam Team dashed on!

## CHAPTER XV.

### FITZNOODLE GUARDS THE FIDDLE.

WHEN John Gall sprang into the midst of his foes, he presented a really odd and terrible appearance.

His face was as colorless as a piece of cut marble.

The injured eye, the one that had been so cruelly burned by Black Jack, was covered with

a black patch. The other eye gleamed with the fires of hate and revenge.

In his hands the powerful blacksmith held a club about two feet long and two inches thick.

It was made of solid iron!

As Black Jack fell to the ground, his falling body almost covered the treasure-box.

With a quick kick John Gall moved the fallen leader aside, and then clutched the box.

Marco, the Spaniard, leaped fiercely upon him.

"Drop that box!" he yelled, drawing a pistol.

Several of the band followed the Spaniard.

John Gall's movements were made like lightning.

Marco was just in the act of raising his pistol to shoot down the bold blacksmith, when the latter struck him a terrible blow with that iron club.

It cracked the Spaniard's skull just as though it were nothing more than an egg.

Right and left flew the brains over those who followed him, and Marco fell back against his much-astonished comrades.

Gall, very wisely, did not give them time to recover their senses.

He whirled the heavy iron club right and left.

It thundered through the air, and with irresistible force it struck against a half dozen heads as it swept around a big circle.

It cracked heads and knocked men over wherever and whenever it struck, and created a momentary confusion that was very favorable to the one man who dared to pit himself against so many.

With the box under his arm he crushed through the demoralized crowd, and made a break for the open plain.

They were after him in a moment, and in such numbers that they bore him to the ground, box and all, by sheer, overwhelming weight.

The treasure was torn from his grasp by the violent jolt, and flew like a meteor through the bushes and trees into some dark corner.

Gall was scarcely down before he was on his feet again.

He found that the box was gone from his hands. He could not hope to recover it now, and his best policy was to get away.

He made one terrible sweep with his iron club, and then leaped away in the darkness, leaving more broken heads behind him.

"After him—after him," yelled half a score of voices, and Gall soon found that he was pursued by several fleet runners.

He could hear the patter of their feet on the plain in the stillness of the night, but when he glanced over his shoulder he could not see their forms, for as the reader knows, the night was a dark one.

"They think I've got the box," muttered the blacksmith, as he ran on. "They may leave there and never think of looking for the treasure, believing that I have got it."

Once again he glanced over his shoulder towards the camp.

Several men were issuing from the grove with torches in their hands, with the evident purpose of hunting the blacksmith down by torchlight.

The men who had first started out from the grove after Gall, were now between him and the torches, and he could see their forms very plainly against the backing of flame.

One, he observed, was quite near him.

The blacksmith crouched down in the grass, and held his weapon ready for a blow.

The man reached his side, and then paused, his form bent forward in a listening attitude.

"You'll never hear my footsteps in this world," said Gall, and with the words he rose up, and struck the doomed outlaw below the head, breaking his neck instantly.

Then the blacksmith ran on.

He had suffered terribly at the hands of Black Jack's gang, but he was wreaking a terrible revenge.

Only let him see Black Jack stretched out cold at his feet, if, indeed, he were not already dead, and he would then feel that the debt of blood between them was paid in full: for he well knew that his iron weapon had crushed

the life out of more than one outlaw that night.

He ran on steadily, glancing back now and then, and saw now that the lighted torches were raised fully four or five feet above his head.

"I understand it," he said; "they are mounted torch-bearers, and expect to ride me down, thinking that I've still got the treasure."

The number of torches told him that about a dozen mounted men were in pursuit.

They spread out immediately upon leaving the grove, thus covering a line nearly a quarter of a mile wide, and came sweeping on at a sharp gallop.

John Gall found that he was now in great danger of being discovered, for the bright torches would certainly reveal him to some sharp eyes.

But, trusting that he might be able to elude them yet, he ran on with a steady trot, hoping that his foes would become discouraged, and drop the pursuit.

"Oh, for one good man to stand by me!" he cried.

"Be me sowl, I think ye are callin' upon meself, so I do," put in a rich voice, and three forms suddenly loomed up before Gall's gaze through the darkness. "How good a mon are yez axin' for?"

The blacksmith stopped, recognizing Barney's voice.

"You are the Irishman who travels with the Steam Team party?"

"I am that Celtic gentleman," importantly said Shea, while the professor and Fitznoodle stood still and said nothing. "Would yez have th' extrame nateness and civility to infarm me if that's a torchlight preceshing out yonther?"

"They are mounted men, with lighted torches, hunting me down."

"Ye'll not be taken?"

"Not alive."

"Then it's meself that'll shtand yer frind, or be taken dead along wid ye," said Barney. "Fitznoodle, dear."

"Yes, my good Mister Shea."

"May I throuble ye to hold me darlin' fiddle and bow while I knock the smithereens out of the haythenish moss throopers?"

"H'ah! h'I h'am h'entirely at your service," said Fitznoodle, and took the fiddle and bow.

"Professor, h'as this valuable h'instrument might be h'endangered by h'us remaining 'ere, h'I propose that we retire. Just a little ways h'off."

"Certainly, Mr. Fitznoodle," said the professor, and then these two gallant men ran away with the fiddle and bow.

"Look at the bogthroppers run, would ye?" laughed Barney. "Niver mind, I think they'll save me fiddle."

And then he grasped his shillelah in one hand, and a pistol, ready cocked, in the other, and awaited the coming of the mounted men.

Gall also drew a pistol, a heavy, long range Colt's revolver, throwing a ball nearly as big as a rifle would carry, and killing at a wonderful distance.

"They are six to one," said Gall to his companion in arms. "Our plan is to shoot them as they come within the range of our pistols; get rid of as many that way as possible, and then use our clubs when they come to close quarters."

"I'm wid ye, me bouchal, and I'll sthick to ye till the back of me head freezes, so I will," said Barney, delighted with the idea of a ruction, and he clutched his blackthorn stick fondly, only hoping that the affair on hand would come to "close quarters."

"Ready, now," said Gall, cocking his heavy revolver. "They are within range."

On came the horsemen at a steady pace, glancing to the left and to the right for the fugitive, flashing the torches back and forth in their keen search.

The blacksmith drew a bead on the foremost rider, just as the outlaw raised up in his stirrups. Crack!

The bullet had gone forth.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### BARNEY GETS TO "CLOSE QUARTERS."

We will now follow Pomp in his adventures. The negro could scarcely comprehend what had happened.

Fortunately for him, he fell on top, and his enemy served to break the fall, which was a considerable one.

Had the white man been in right mind and condition he probably would have been killed by the fall, but he was too wild to notice it.

With a furious yell, still clutching the black with all his strength, he rolled over and over, trying, it seemed, to get on top of Pomp, but the latter would not allow it.

"No sah, not if dis coon knows it, sah, not a bit ob it, sah," said the dwarf, and he gave the man a hug that would have done credit to a bear.

He nearly squeezed the life out of his foe; then he wrenched himself free, stood up, and caught the man up with his black paws.

He raised him above his head, and with all his immense strength dashed him down on the ground.

The man lay there without motion or sound.

Whether dead or not, he certainly was no longer an active enemy, and Pomp paid no attention to him.

The black looked around anxiously for the Steam Team.

As the reader knows, the course of the team running in a circle was the way in which the reins were grasped by the man as he lay on the driving seat of the wagon.

Now that the uneven pull was removed, the team dashed on in a straight line, and Pomp could see the brilliant headlight streaming out upon the plain about a mile away.

He looked around for Frank Reade and Charley, but, of course, they were veiled from him by darkness.

"Dey might be a mile off, an' dey might be clus to me," said Pomp. "Guess I'll gib 'em a yell."

He placed his hand near his mouth, and gave utterance to a peculiar, long-reaching yell.

A moment later back came a yell in answer, and following close upon it the voice of Charley Gorse:

"Pomp."

"Here I is."

"We're coming."

He could hear their horses running towards him, and started towards them.

In two minutes they met.

"Well?" said Frank.

In a few words Pomp told them what had occurred.

"Let the fellow lay wherever he may be, and be hanged to him," said Frank. "Only let me get my Team back, and I'll be well satisfied. Do you see it, Charley?"

"Yes," said Gorse, and it appears to be about a mile away, to my eyes."

"So I think," said Frank, "and yet it may easily be five miles distant. We can only see the electric light, and that is a very deceiving thing."

"Say," said Pomp.

"Say on."

"Does yer notice one t'ing?"

"What?"

"Dat de light don't seem to git any farder off?"

"That's so," cried Charley.

"I'm blessed if he ain't right," muttered Frank Reade. "I see it all now. Boys, the Team is standing still!"

"How can that be?" said Charley. "There was nobody to stop the machine."

"I don't know how it was, but the fact shows for itself," said Frank. "I'm very much afraid something is wrong."

"Let's start for the wagon."

"Come on."

They started away on a smart gallop, dashing on towards the brilliant light that was streaming out on the plains with a brilliancy never seen in that wild locality before.

They had passed over about two miles of ground when they suddenly heard shots and yells.

The sounds came from the right hand, and turning their heads, they beheld a number of torches executing queer antics about half a mile away.

"Those torches are carried by mounted men, and they are pursuing some poor devil," said Gorse. "Let's see what it's about."

"It's not far out of our course, and as we may be able to help some poor chap, we'll do it," said Frank.

So the horses' heads were turned to the right hand, and they bore down on the torches.

Of course, as the reader has probably surmised, they came upon the mounted assailants of Barney Shea and the man he had sworn to stand by, John Gall.

The two brave men had met their mounted foes gallantly.

They had one advantage over their enemies in that they could see the outlaws very plainly in the light of the torches, while they, themselves, were more in the gloom, and they did not hesitate to improve this slight advantage by delivering a telling fire before the matter became a hand-to-hand affair.

With a terrific sweep of his iron club, the blacksmith swept aside half a dozen weapons that were pointed at him, and knocked two of his assailants from the backs of the horses they bestrode.

Barney's club was only a blackthorn stick, but he was a true Irishman, and could handle his native weapon in wonderful style.

He laid about him right and left like a giant, and used his shillelah with such skill that the prairie bandits had gained no advantage when Frank and his two companions galloped up to the spot.

"Hurrah!" yelled Frank, and put a bullet into the body of the first outlaw he could plainly see.

"Pill number two from this traveling dispensary," shouted Charley, and banged away.

"Room fur de black hurricane, if youse please," cried the dwarf, and the sable dead shot poured in his bullets so fast that they sounded like a volley.

"Murder an' ouns," groaned Barney, as he broke the head of a man who tried to stab him. "Here's Frank, and he'll be afther sthoppin' the foight in no time. Bedad, and it's the first good fun I've had at close quarters, so don't ind it, Frank dear."

"I'll not," said Frank, blocking a blow, and sending back a bullet in return. "Fight it out."

But the bandits had no intention of fighting it out against so many fire-eaters.

They turned tail and fled from the scene, leaving one man dead, with a bullet in his heart, and a second man with his head fairly crushed by a blow from John Gall's iron club.

More of the rascals were injured, but not so badly as to prevent them from riding off.

After the first fire the torches had gone down to the ground, and in the very uncertain light the shots fired by either side had not been accurately aimed.

Nevertheless, Frank had a bullet in his leg, just under the skin, which was forced out without trouble, and Barney Shea complained that he was wounded.

"Where?" asked Charley.

He caught up a torch, waved it into a blaze, and approached the gallant Irishman.

"Where?" cried Barney. "Begorra, and I'm wounded in several places. Look at the blood on me, would ye?"

"Yes, and brains, too," said Frank.

"Och, worra—worra, me head's broke, and I'm ruined, so I am," yelled the Irishman. "Murder! me brains are blowed out."

But when they came to examine him more closely they laughed heartily at poor Shea.

He certainly was covered with blood and brains, but they were from the skull that had been smashed by the blacksmith.

"Thin I'm not kilt?" earnestly said Shea.

"Not a bit of it!"

"All right," said Barney, and made no further complaint.

The blacksmith, who was uninjured, told Frank and the others of the vain attempt he

had made to wrest the box of money from his enemies and carry it off himself.

"And I'm going back there," moodily said the avenger. "I have nothing else in life to do but to revenge myself on Black Jack and his band, and to recover the treasure. That iron box contains the wealth of many people, and on its loss or recovery depends the prosperity or poverty of a good many hard-working families."

"I'll be after you soon," said Frank Reade.

"Well and good," said John Gall, and then he shouldered his iron club, and off he went in the darkness.

"Come," said Frank, "away, lads, to the Steam Team."

"Where are the professor and Fitz?" asked Charley Gorse.

"Worra, but I forgot the milk-and-wather craythurs," cried Barney. "They wint off whin the foight was comin' on, and, bedad, I think they're a divilish long ways off, so I do."

Charley yelled out Fitznoodle's name at the top capacity of his lungs, but received no answer.

"Let them go," impatiently said Frank, who was anxious to start. "Barney, you get up behind Pomp, and away we'll go."

Pomp's horse was heavily built, and stood the weight easily.

They started off once more.

The brilliant headlight from Frank's wagon was still beaming out upon the plain, and to their eyes it did not seem that the Team could have moved from the spot in which it had been located at first sight.

As they neared the wagon they saw forms in the brilliant stream of light.

"There's a number of men in front of the Team," said Charley.

"I don't care," recklessly said Frank Reade; "I'm after my property, and I'm going to get it. Fire a volley to scare them off."

Crack—crack—crack, went the pistols, and a number of shouts arose.

Then there was a hasty scattering of the strange forms that stood before the Team.

"Come on," said Frank. "If they're not gone we'll fight them. My blood is up now."

He and his companions charged forward, but when they reached the wagon they found it deserted.

The strangers were gone.

There stood the Team, motionless and grim. The valves were hissing, and Frank could see that there was a good head of steam on.

"What in the world can be the reason that it stopped?" murmured the young inventor, carefully examining all the points to ascertain the cause of the stop.

"Maybe the water's out," suggested the Irishman.

"Darn the luck!" suddenly snapped out Frank Reade, pausing in front of his Team and gazing down with a troubled look at the forelegs of his metal steed. "Here I am, miles from a settlement, and both of the front shank-rods are broken. Here we are stuck until the loss is made good."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### FRANK EXPLAINS THE BREAK.

"What is it?" asked Charley, and then they all crowded around Frank, as he stood ruefully in front of the Team.

"Why, see here," said Frank. "From the thigh runs down an iron rod that works just about the same as all the connecting rods that run to driving wheels and engines. Both rods, or, rather, all four of them, have been broken by some means. Probably, having no driver, the Team bounced over stones and stumps, and the deuce knows what, and one after another of the rods were strained, and finally snapped. Just as soon as they were broken, the reverse action ceased, and the hind legs received no power. Thus the Team came to a dead halt."

"And we're at a dead halt until new rods are supplied?" anxiously asked Gorse.

"That's the tune of it," said Frank. "My Team can't stir until the rods are in place. I'll

get a bright lantern, and find out the full extent of all the damage and loss."

He clambered up into the wagon in the expectation of seeing a number of things broken and scattered, and also fearing to discover the loss of some of his goods, but to his great joy he found that all his drawers and lockers were untouched.

"That's a bit of luck," said Frank. "At all events, we can make a defense against all enemies."

"And that reminds me that we have reason to fear a raid," said Gorse.

"Why?"

"Those men we frightened off."

"They may return?"

"Without doubt."

"Then," said Frank, "as we certainly cannot leave here to-night, I shall make preparations for defense as soon as I examine the Team fully."

He secured a lantern, made with his own hands, and which contained one long coil of thinly-beaten magnesium tape, wound around a drum that revolved by the power of a watch movement set in the back of the contrivance, and fed the tape out as fast as it was consumed by a small light from an oil lamp.

Frank ignited this lantern, and then at once extinguished the monster electric light.

Then, with the wonderful lantern in his hand, he made a very thorough inspection of the various parts of the machinery.

He found some parts a little bent and twisted, and here and there a bolt or screw would require some little attention before it would be safe to go on again, but all the requisite repairs could have been made in less than an hour, had it not been for the rods.

Two of these were broken entirely, fairly snapped in twain, and were of no further use; the other two had nearly become detached, and merely required riveting.

"What's to be done?" asked Gorse.

"Well, you suggest something," said the young inventor.

"I propose that we make ourselves as strong as possible here against any probable attack. Take turns in watching all night, and then in the morning one of us can mount a horse and hie away to the nearest village, where a blacksmith can make the rods. It might only take the forenoon to go, get them, and to return."

"That's sensible," said Frank. "I guess we'll follow that plan. Where are the horses?"

He flashed his brilliant lantern on all sides, and discovered that Pomp had secured the three horses to the rear of the wagon with ropes that were long enough to allow the animals to feed.

"Take good care of them, Pomp," said Frank to the darkey, "for we'll need one of them in the morning."

"All right, sah."

"How far away do you reckon the nearest village to be?" asked Frank of Gorse.

"About fifteen miles," said Charley. "It lies thirty miles from Reefer's Bluff, I believe, and I estimate that we're about half way between."

"Lord only knows what sort of a blacksmith you'll find, and what sort of rods he'll make you," said Frank. "But if they'll fit, and make the Team travel once more, I'll not grumble. Now to fix things in shape for the night."

He turned his lantern to all points of the compass.

The magnesium light, backed by a polished reflector, lit up the plain with a strong light that would enable one to discern any object the size of a human being at the distance of a quarter of a mile.

Nobody was in sight, but Frank could dimly make out a grove that loomed up perhaps half a mile away, and in which it was probable that the men were encamped who had been driven away from the wagon.

"Without doubt their curiosity will lead them back again," said Frank. "I wonder whether they're white or red?"

He went on with his preparations for defense.

With Charley's aid, he drove into the plain, at a distance of fifty feet from the wagon, a number of thin iron rods, about six feet long, capped with glass.

The rods were sunk into the earth about a foot, and formed a circle around the wagon.

A thin wire was then passed from one rod to the next, coiling about the glass cap, and in a few moments the rods were all united.

Then the wire was carried from the last pole, or rod, to the wagon, and united to the main wires that ran to the electric light by means of a binding post.

Frank then attached another piece of wire to a large gong, loud enough to awaken the soundest sleeper.

"There," he said, in a satisfied tone, "now we are prepared on the outside. The moment that anything touches our fence we shall know it."

He opened his trunk, and took from it several pieces of paper, folded in a very curious manner, and placed them on top of the box, where he could reach them at a moment's notice.

Then, from various boxes and drawers, he produced a bottle of naphtha, pieces of cotton, fireworks large and small, and a variety of mysterious looking articles.

"Let them visit me to-night," muttered the young genius. "I'll scare the wits out of any gang that comes fooling around here."

Then he threw himself down on his bunk, telling his comrades to do the same, and with the utmost trust in the brains of their young leader, they complied.

Within fifteen minutes all four were asleep.

Perhaps an hour had passed when the gong struck, and its ringing sound awoke them.

Frank was one of that sort of people who come out of a slumber fully awake.

With a swift motion of his hand he touched the knob of the electric cut-out and united the wires.

The instant that the circuit was made complete, a beautiful and startling sight was presented.

The wire fence aflame with a bright blue fire.

The flames leaped and danced on the wire with a weird and ghastly light and revealed the presence of about half a hundred Indians, who were slinking back in sudden alarm from the blazing fence.

Three of the red rascals lay upon the ground, evidently prostrated by a great shock.

They had probably been handling the wire at the time when the young genius turned the switch, and had received the full force of the battery.

Frank picked up a ball that he had put on top of his trunk. It was about the size of a billiard ball.

Barney, Pomp, and the young Westerner banged away at the Indians as they stood there in astonishment, but Frank did not use firearms.

He stood up erect in the wagon, and hurled the ball high up in the air, and out towards the dusky crowd.

Up went the ball for fifty feet, and then descended.

It struck fairly among the startled reds, plainly revealed in the flashing electric blaze.

Boom!

A report like that of a heavy cannon thundered forth.

The ground shook, and even the heavy wagon seemed to tremble with the effect of that terrible concussion.

Indians, in whole and in parts, flew up into the air, scattered right and left, and back and forth, like bounding balls, while a chorus of yells and shrieks rang out upon the midnight air.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### FRANK'S FIRE-WORKS.

"Oh, de debbil!" cried Pomp.

"Tare-an-ouns!" said Barney.

"What in thunder was that?" demanded Charley Gorse.

"Merely a little ball of nitro-glycerine—that was all," grinned Frank. "Of course, it's a severe remedy, but what would have become of us with, perhaps, not less than fifty Indians barred from as merely by a wire? Had they broken down that slight fence it would have been all up with us, and by this time our scalps would be hanging from their belts. It was either slaughter or to be slaughtered, and as the song says: 'I like myself the best.'"

"You're quite right," said Gorse. "But look at them scatter."

The explosion of the ball of nitro-glycerine had killed and wounded not less than a dozen of the astonished reds, and the rest of the pack, too badly alarmed to look after their wounded friends, darted away at the top of their speed.

They were not used to any such warfare.

"Lively, now, and chase them!" Frank said, and picked up some of his large fire-works.

In a moment he and Charley sent two brilliant sky-rockets careening over the heads of the flying Indians, and then gave them a show of bright Roman candles.

The fire-works revealed the Indians, all running as though pursued by the Evil One.

"Now for my giant," said Frank. "The wind lies towards them, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Gorse.

"Give us a lift," said Reade, and he picked up one of the pieces of paper and unfolded it.

"Jump up on the seat and hold the top," said Frank, and taking hold of the top part of the folded sheet, Gorse leaped up on the driving seat.

The paper now appeared to be fully eight or nine feet long, and began to look like a lanky giant.

Frank poured naphtha on pieces of cotton, secured them to thin wires that crossed the soles of the giant's feet, and then set fire to the saturated balls.

In less than two minutes a large quantity of gas was generated, and filled out the interior of this strangely-formed balloon, so that the giant appeared to have immense legs, and a considerable stomach.

The giant was made of extremely thin tissue paper, and the light of the naphtha was sufficient to make the entire form like a live coal from head to foot.

"Let him go," said Frank.

Charley released the head. The giant went up about two feet, and then he descended, but at the same time he was moved by the breeze out towards the fugitive Indians, and passed safely over the wire fence.

Then he touched the ground, rebounded just as lightly as a feather, and was borne straight ahead by the breeze, keeping just about a foot from the plain, and moving on in the most grand and majestic style.

When the Indians saw this illuminated giant coming after them their fears were redoubled, and they screamed in terror as they rushed for the grove.

The breeze freshened. The giant fairly ran them down, and careering just a trifle too much, his legs caught fire, and in a moment he was in a blaze.

Then Frank and the others had a full view of what followed.

The giant had just reached them when he caught fire, and in the most abject terror the Indians fell upon the ground before this unknown od of flame.

In just fifteen seconds the entire sheet of tissue paper was consumed, and all was dark again.

"There," said Frank. "The terrifying spirit disappeared in flame before their eyes, and as they'll give him the benefit of all that has occurred, why, you can wager your bottom dollar that they'll not trouble us again."

At early daylight in the morning our party woke up, and looked out upon the remnants of the previous night's slaughter.

The heads and arms and even whole bodies were unpleasant objects to look upon, so Pomp buried them.

They had breakfast, and then Frank took the measurements of the rods he required, and it was decided that his cousin should get them.

So Charley loaded his weapon in very careful style, and mounting his horse he rode away.

"You'll find us here when you get back, old boy," yelled Frank.

"Without doubt," grinned Gorse.

The sun was just arisen as he rode away, and feeling in excellent spirits he urged the horse into a swinging gallop, and rode along at that exhilarating pace for an hour.

His steed slowed into a gentle canter, and he was thinking of the events of the previous night, when suddenly he heard a rumbling, then a series of shouts, a number of loud yells, shots, shrieks, screams and cries.

He pulled up instantly, and beheld a sight that thrilled him.

About half a mile distant on the right hand two white-covered wagons, drawn by four horses each, were plunging along at a high rate of speed.

In front of the first wagon rode two men, and three more brought up the rear, following behind the second wagon.

Not more than a quarter of a mile in the rear of this little caravan, and speeding after them, were fully a dozen of those prairie bandits who infest the vast plains of the west like birds of prey.

The pursuers were firing as they rode, and yelling between every shot.

One of the mounted men riding at the rear of the second wagon was very evidently wounded, for he swayed to and fro on his horse like a man under the influence of liquor.

"A small party of miners with their families, on the way to the mines," said Gorse, the moment his eyes rested on the white wagons. "They're pursued by some of those plunderers who would rob the dead. More than two to one. I'll help them—but what then? It's more than two to one at that, with one man wounded. They are doomed, and I can see women in the wagons, and hear them cry and scream."

He got worked up, and striking his horse he galloped forward like a true born American boy to the aid of the little party.

"Why don't they come to a halt, and fight like men?" Charley cried; but just at that moment he saw what had caused them to whip their horses into a run and endeavor to escape.

They were approaching a portion of the plain where nature, in one of her sportive moods, had thrown up a large quantity of both rock and earth, which arose in the form of irregular hillocks and walls, thus covering about an acre of ground in this strange manner.

Towards this spot they were heading.

There was but one way to enter this strangely inclosed retreat with such an affair as a wagon, and that was a narrow break between two high hills.

With a yell the horses were forced to enter this strange gateway. The first team passed through. The wagon of the second team caught on the side of the passage, and the frightened horses reared and plunged.

The mounted rascals spurred forward with the idea of taking advantage of the situation, but the miners turned on them and gave them a volley.

Charley, armed with a long-range carbine, poured in shot after shot, also, and leaving one of their number dead before the hillocks, away went the discomfited fiends, only to pull up and squat down on the prairie when positive that they were out of gunshot.

Charley Gorse dashed up to the pass just as the second wagon glided through into the inclosure.

"Thanks for your help," said one of the miners to him. "But we're in a bad box, neighbor, and I don't see how we're going to get out of it while those chaps are squatting there on the plain, ready to pounce on us the minute we come out."

"Keep up your spirits," said Charley Gorse. "Be watchful. Keep them off to-day, and if all goes well with me I'll be here to-night with the Steam Team to rescue you!"

And then he dashed away.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A TERRIBLE DANGER.

THE horse that Charley Gorse rode was a good one, and dashed along over the plains like a racer.

It was not yet nine o'clock in the morning when Frank's cousin dashed into a thriving village, and pulled up before the workshop of the village blacksmith.

He secured his horse and entered the shop.

"Can you make me some iron rods after this pattern?" he asked, showing the sizes prepared by Frank.

"I can," said the blacksmith.

"Then lively is the word," said Gorse. "The quicker the job the bigger the price you'll get."

Thereupon the smith fell to work with a will, and in less than an hour the rods were fashioned out and given into Charley's hands.

He paid the man a good price for his work, and then remounted his horse, gave him a drink from the flowing butt outside the smithy, and rattled away.

On his homeward road he kept a sharp eye out for the miners he had left in distress.

There they were, peeping out of the little rocky hills, keeping a sharp lookout for danger. The prairie thieves had not quitted their squatting place. Charley could see them in the grass, playing cards and sleeping.

He pretended to take no notice of either party, but kept on his way at the best speed of his good horse.

"The rascals!" he muttered, thinking of the outlaws. "They would stay in that spot until night-fall, not daring to attack the people entrenched behind the little mounds, because they might get bullets instead of plunder. When darkness favored them the brutes would crawl over the rocks and murder the women and children in cold blood. But I'll try to put a check to their little game."

On he went, and by the sun it was not yet high noon when he caught sight of the Steam Team, and heard Pomp and Barney playing a rattling duet, and singing together in the most vigorous style.

Frank was cleaning the machinery and making all ready.

"Got 'em?" he yelled.

"Yes."

"Bully boy!"

And he eagerly examined the rods as Charley handed them over.

"They'll do," he said.

"Then be lively, and put them in order as soon as you can," said Gorse. "We are wanted some few miles from here."

The others gathered around and gave their attention while Charley told of the scene he had witnessed that morning, and of the present attitude of the prairie thieves.

"Clar to gosh!" cried Pomp, "dar's moosic in de air."

"Tare an' 'ouns!" yelled Barney, as he twirled his shillelah. "There's another illegant ruction brewin', and be the sowl of me black sow I'll crack the nose of the wan that tries to put a sthop to the foight. Moind now, ye little conthrin' divil, ye," to Frank, "I'll be the murderin' of ye if ye thry to ind too soon."

"Never fear," said Frank; "I'll give you your fill for once. If the boys say so, I'll let you tackle the gang alone."

"Not I," said Barney; "I'm not such a mane omadhaun to want all the honor an' glory for meself."

Frank fell to work, and with Charley's assistance was putting the rods in place.

Pomp put away his banjo and got the dinner ready.

"Come 'long, Massa Frank," called out the darkey; "dinner is ready."

"Just got one more rod to do," said Frank.

"But de dinner am spillin'," groaned the colored cook.

"Come along, Frank," said Charley; "Pomp is touchy about his cooking. You can fix the rod after dinner."

And Frank complied, but he soon had cause

to regret that he left his work unfinished on account of the dinner.

They were sitting together in the body of the wagon, eating and talking in the merriest style, and wondering what had become of Fitznoodle and the professor, when suddenly Pomp lifted his head.

"What's up?" asked Charley.

"Am dat lightnin'?" said Pomp.

"I didn't see it," said Frank.

"Me nudder," said Pomp, "but I clar to gosh I heard de thunder."

"Nonsense," said Gorse.

"Listen—listen," said Pomp, holding up his black paw. "I kin hear de thunder agin."

"By Jove!" muttered Frank; "I can hear a rumbling like a distant peal of thunder, and yet the sky is just as clear as can be."

"Begorra, an' I hear it meself," said the Irishman. "It kapes on rumblin' an' rumblin', so it does."

The whole party now became fully conscious of the fact that there was a steady rumbling sound in the air, very low and distant it seemed, but steadily increasing.

"What the deuce can it be?" said the young inventor. "It sounds to me like an earthquake."

"And so it may be," said Charley. "We have a little shake-up in these parts every few years."

"I'll just take the field-glass and have a squint over the plains," decided the young leader, and dropping the bit of meat he was eating, he caught up the glass.

Putting it to his eye he began to look over the plains.

When he turned the glass so as to look back on a line with the wagon, he stood perfectly still, and a cry of astonishment escaped him.

The others sprang up.

"What is it?"

"Look!" said Frank, handing the glass to Charley.

This is what the latter saw:

A few miles away, but plunging on with mad speed, came an immense herd of buffaloes.

The vast congregation of animals covered the plain to the width of about half a mile, and the ranks were about a hundred deep.

Behind this brute army about half a mile, yet steadily gaining on the maddened beasts, there was a steadily advancing wall of flame.

The prairie was on fire; the buffaloes were endeavoring to escape the flames, and they were bearing down like a mighty torrent directly upon the Steam Team.

Frank and Charley both recognized the danger at the same moment.

They were in danger of being fairly crushed out of existence beneath the hoofs of the brute army.

"My God, we shall all be killed!" cried Frank. "The last rod has got to be put in position before we can start. Quick, Charley, for your life!"

They sprang from the wagon, and rushed to their work.

Steadily onward came the immense herd of buffaloes, and now the thunder of their hoofbeats made the earth tremble and filled the air with a deafening noise.

"Get up steam, Pomp," shouted Frank, to the darkey. "Have all ready, or we are gone!"

The darkey flew to his task, and soon had the steam hissing.

Frank and Charley were working fast, but their hands trembled with excitement.

"It's on," said Charley, as the rod was placed in position.

"It's off!" groaned Frank, as the iron snapped out of place again. "Why, the nut wasn't on the bolt."

Steadily onward came that mighty army of crazed buffaloes, and now Frank and Charley had to shout, one to the other, in order to be heard above the thundering din.

"For God's sake, be lovely!" shrieked Barney Shea from the wagon. "They're near at hand."

"All right," joyfully cried Frank, as the work was completed.

They rushed to the wagon, and Frank leaped upon the driving seat with a bound.

Pomp had cut the tethers of the three horses, and they had run away at full speed.

Frank clutched the reins, and was so excited and shaky that he dropped them again.

The buffaloes were not a hundred yards away.

Once let that irresistible front rank strike the wagon with the force that was lent by the army at the back, and the vehicle and team would be overturned in an instant.

Pomp caught at the reins and gave them into Frank's hands. He let on a big head of steam.

With a jolt the Steam Team started off, the new rods working perfectly.

Thump!

Before the wagon had time to go two lengths, half a dozen buffaloes came plump up against the end of it.

The vehicle jumped from the ground, and Frank was hurled from his seat by the shock.

Barney and Charley were both thrown flat to the bottom of the wagon, and Shea was rendered senseless by his head coming against the solid wood of the flooring.

Pomp, who had seen the buffaloes as they neared the wagon, thought that there might be a slight shock, and so he had caught hold of the driving-seat with one hand.

Only his immense strength saved him from being thrown down.

As Frank flew over backwards, the reins were torn from his hands and flew into the air.

Pomp, quick as a weasel in every movement, caught them.

Frank turned a complete somersault, and landed on his head and shoulders in the bottom of the wagon, knocking the breath completely out of his body by the fall, and so, had it not been for the prompt action of the young athlete, they would certainly have been doomed.

The Team did not stop, but when the reins were torn from Frank's hands, the metal steeds bounded ahead like rockets for a few yards, and then slackened their pace to a slow action.

For an instant the buffaloes had been distanced, but now they were coming on again.

Pomp twined his legs under the seat, and passed his long arms around it, also, clutching it with a powerful grip as he let on the fullest possible amount of steam.

Thump!

Again there was a shock, and again the wagon bounded from the ground as several beasts came plump up against the end board.

Charley and Frank bounced up like rubber balls, and Barney shot from one end of the wagon to the other, but Pomp was holding on with arms and legs, and could not be shaken from his position.

Had the wagon been standing still the resistance would have been enough to have dumped it over, but even the moderate speed at which it was going saved it.

As the vehicle touched the ground again, the Team felt the additional steam, and rushed away with a magnificent burst of speed.

On—on, like the tempest dashed the Steam Team, and in less than five minutes the buffaloes and the raging fire were left a mile behind.

Then the black driver moderated his speed, swerved to the right, ran on a few miles further in order to be out of all danger, and brought the Team to a stand-still.

His three friends lay silent and bleeding in the bottom of the wagon.

## CHAPTER XX.

### TO THE RESCUE!

"CLAR to gosh, dey look jes' like dey am dead," muttered Pomp, and he felt just a trifle alarmed as he looked down upon the motionless forms.

The fact of the matter was that the three in the bottom of the wagon had been all bumped and thumped into insensibility, and in a few moments they all came back to life.

Frank's face was cut, and the blood was trickling in two different little streams down his cheeks.

Barney had part of his nose twisted, and the organ was bleeding profusely.

Charley felt as though his head had been cracked, but soon found that he was all right.

"That was a narrow escape," said the inventor of the Steam Team, wiping the blood from his face. "And we owe our lives to Pomp. How did you manage to get away?"

Pomp told them how he had clung to the seat while driving.

"Worra—worra, will I iver get this divilish nose inter shape again, I d'now?" the Irishman cried, looking into a hand-mirror with dismay. "Begob, and I niver got such a weltnin' at a fair in the ould art."

While washing and patching themselves they looked at the sides and front of the wagon, and found that no injury had been done.

"See how that fire still burns," said Charley Gorse.

He pointed to the path of the fire, still advancing speedily over the plains, consuming the tall grass with startling rapidity.

"By Heavens, there's a man running in advance of the flames," suddenly said Frank.

"Two of 'em!" yelled Pomp. "See dem between de buffers and de fire, and not far ahead of de flame."

It was true.

Two men were running for life in advance of the flames.

Frank caught up a glass and brought it to bear on the fugitives.

"Fitznoodle and the professor!" he cried out, in surprise.

"They're doomed!" said Gorse. "Nothing can save them."

"Poor fellows," said Frank, as a cloud of smoke and fire shut them out from view. "We have seen the last of them."

And he sorrowfully lowered the glass and turned away.

They could see the flames sweep on, and pass by the spot where they had last seen their friends, and when the wall of fire passed on in its awful course, they turned away with a sickening feeling at their hearts.

"Ugh!" shuddered Charley. "That was an awful death to die."

"It makes the soul of me sick whin I think of it," said the good-hearted Irishman. "Strike me down wid a flash o' lightnin', or put a bullet through me heart, or dhrown me; but to burn loike a pig—oh, murder!"

"At all events," said Frank, "now that they are dead, we can pay them our last respects by giving them a decent burial."

"Yes, let's plant them decently," said Gorse.

"I knows 'bout whar dey was obertaken by de flames," said Pomp. "See dem two big trees standin' togedder?"

"Yes."

"Near dar."

Frank jumped up to his seat once more, and started the Team towards the spot indicated.

"They must have been resting under those trees," he said to Charley. "When they saw the buffaloes coming they huddled close to the trees, and those heavy trunks forced the buffaloes to divide. Then, after the brutes had gone by, they started to run, but no man can outrun a prairie fire."

In a very short time they were on the spot, and Frank Reade brought the team to a halt.

"Jump down, Barney," he said to the Irishman. "You've got the heaviest shoes. Are they lying yonder?"

The ground was still very hot, and Barney felt as though he were walking on a furnace when he made towards a dark object about a hundred yards from the trees, which had caught fire, but was burning very slowly.

"It's a log!" he yelled back to those in the wagon, as he approached the blackened object, and saw that it was the trunk of a tree that had probably lain there for years.

"Eh, what's that?" said a voice from the log, which was burning at several points.

Barney jumped with alarm.

"Come here, professor; the fire 'as h'all gone past, h'and 'ere h's one h'of h'our friends h'at 'and," said another voice, and to the astonishment of the party, Fitznoodle and the professor crawled out of the hollow trunk of the tree, and stood erect and unharmed on the prairie.

"H'oh, it's 'ot!" roared George Augustus, and he made a frantic dash for the wagon,

speedily followed by the professor, whose thin shoes made him dance like a ballet girl.

"Safe!" yelled Frank.

"Hurrah!" shouted Pomp and Charley, and then they caught hold of the men they had thought to see no more alive, and hauled them into the wagon with a joyous shout that attested how glad they really were.

"We thought you were burned alive, and came to bury you," said Frank.

"H'oh, no, h'I don't mind h'any such little thing h'as that," blustered George Augustus. "The trees protected h'us from the cows, you know, h'and h'I knew h'of the 'oller log, you know, h'and 'ad no doubt we'd be secure h'in that, you know, so h'I wasn't h'agitated h'in the least degree, you know."

"Come, Frank," said Charley, "don't let us lose any more time, but get away to the assistance of those miners who are besieged in the little rocky hills."

"Just let me get my suit of mail on, and we're off," said Frank.

He got into his heavy bullet-proof suit with Pomp's assistance, and then mounted his seat and started off, Charley giving him the course. Pomp busied himself in getting all the weapons into shape, and had them all loaded and capped, when Charley shouted:

"They're there still."

The outlaws sprang up when the Team came dashing toward them, and for a moment they didn't know what to make of the strange vehicle and the stranger steeds.

Pomp lifted the long-range rifle, and bored a hole completely through the head of one of them, and then they recognized their danger.

Their horses were together close at hand, and they rushed for the animals with all speed, but the Steam Team dashed down upon them in a twinkling, and was brought to a stand-still by the skillful driver fairly between the outlaws and their horses.

Then simultaneously, Pomp, Barney, and Charley blazed away, pouring in a sharp volley that was terribly effective, and Frank, as soon as he could get hold of a revolver that lay at his side, cracked away as merrily as they. The first return fire was directed at Frank, each one of the rascals popping at him because he was so exposed; but the bullets rebounded in the most harmless style from the suit of mail.

In less than five seconds as many of the outlaws had been tumbled over by the bullets of our friends.

A loud shout rang out, and the miners, issuing from the little hills, ran towards the scene of the conflict.

"Hooroo!" yelled Shea, catching up his shillelah. "Give thim a chance, if they are hay-thens."

And he proved his benevolent ideas by leaping from the wagon, and cracking the skull of the first outlaw he met, but he was instantly knocked down with the butt of a rifle.

A knife was raised against him, when Pomp leaped like a meteor upon the villain who had brandished it, and sent him headlong to the earth. Charley was tackled on either side the instant he left the wagon, and although he knocked one assailant over, the second one knocked him over, and drew a bead on him with a revolver, to put a ball through the young fellow's heart; but Frank, from his seat, coolly broke the outlaw's wrist with a bullet, and saved his cousin's life.

Then the miners arrived, and finding that they were doomed, the outlaws made a desperate effort, reached their horses, mounted, and dashed away, followed by a storm of bullets, and leaving more than half of their number either dead or wounded on the field.

The victory was complete.

"Any bones broken?" asked Frank.

"None," said the professor. "I have examined all the combatants."

"All aboard, then," said Frank. "Now for Black Jack and the treasure!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE OUTLAWS' STONGHOLD.

The grateful miners thanked our friends

heartily for the assistance they had rendered them, and gave them a hearty cheer when they started off.

"You're going to the grove where we left them yesterday, I suppose," said Gorse to Frank.

"That's the best I can do," said the latter, putting on a trifle more steam, just to bring the rate of speed up to forty miles an hour. "When we get there we shall probably find their trail, and that's broad enough to follow."

"But," said Charley, "you must bear in mind that they rested most of the afternoon and all of the night, and were probably away with the first half hour of daylight."

"What of that?"

"It is now about two o'clock."

"Yes."

"Then they have probably been on the road nine hours, and by this time they're safe in their den, which certainly was not more than fifty miles from the grove."

"And there you think they will be secure from attack."

"I do."

"You don't know what I am able to do yet," said Frank. "If they are really in their stronghold you'll see some lively times."

Onward rattled the Team, dashing over the plain in a manner that made miles glide by very rapidly.

In less than half an hour they were at the grove, and the deserted appearance told them that Black Jack had departed.

"There's not even a stick of their large fire warm!" said Charley, who had jumped down from the wagon as soon as it stopped; "they have been gone for hours."

"All aboard, then," said Frank. "There is the trail, plain enough."

And away they started again on the broad track marked on the plain by the outlaw band.

They maintained that same lasting pace that covered the miles so swiftly, and the whole party experienced a feeling of exhilaration as they were whirled along nearly as fast as the wind ever travels.

Just one hour's travel from the grove brought to their view a solitary form on the plain.

It was a pedestrian, carrying what they at first glance supposed to be a gun, and trudging on with a long, swinging stride.

As they neared him Barney set up a shout.

"Be the smoke o' Kate Kelly's pipe, and it's the same chap that handles that iron shillelah so nately."

"Right," said Frank. "It's our friend the blacksmith."

He whistled for Gall, and the latter came to a halt.

Frank shut off steam, and then the blacksmith came up to the wagon, a dusty and tired man.

He sat down wearily, and placed his iron club in the wagon.

"What time did you leave?" was Frank's first question.

"At daylight."

"And have you been walking ever since then?"

"Yes."

"Had anything to eat?"

"No," said the avenger; "I don't think of food."

Frank had now run sixty miles, with only a short stop, and some of the joints were swelling.

He called a halt for fifteen minutes to oil and cool off, and during this time Charley got some food for the blacksmith, and the latter devoured it in a manner that told very plainly he had not tasted food for fully twenty-four hours.

"I'll go with you," said Gall, and sat down in the bottom of the wagon, and never said a word during the journey.

Once more the Steam Team started off, now heading towards a distant grove that stood near the trail, and where Frank was compelled to stop for a few minutes to get in a full supply of fresh water.

"Now," he said, "I guess we're in good trim to work on for a day or two without having to

stop for anything or anybody. Charley, do you see that hill ahead?"

"Yes."

"Ten to one that is the place where Black Jack and his gang hold out."

The hill indicated by Frank rose up abruptly on the plain some miles ahead, and by bringing the glass to bear upon it Charley could see that it was the shape of a sugar loaf, and ran up to a rather small point.

It was probably three hundred feet high, heavily wooded on one side, and very sparsely wooded on the other.

The hill probably covered not less than twenty acres of ground, and it certainly presented a remarkable appearance, standing there alone on the vast plain, which, otherwise, was unbroken in its smooth, ocean-like extent as far as the eye could see.

"I think you're right," said Charley, laying down the glass. "That must be the spot. They've probably got some houses up among those trees, and live there with women to cook and clean for them."

"I'll rout them out," said Frank.

They were now approaching the hill, and Frank moderated the speed of his Steam Team.

"Get down in the bottom of the wagon, every one of you!" he cried. "They may have sentinels hanging around in among the trees, who would not object to popping at any of us. They can't hurt me."

The others complied, and in less than two minutes the wisdom of Frank's advice became apparent.

Just as Frank discovered that the trail ran up the hill, a shot rang out, and a bullet struck the side of his suit.

Frank looked for the marksman, but could not see him.

However, finding that he could go no further, and not wishing to put his friends in danger, Frank wheeled the Team, and ran them out of rifle-shot from the hill.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it's very plain that the gang is there. Pomp, you take that rifle with the telescopic sight, and keep peeping around. If you happen to see a head just bore a hole through it, and charge it to me."

"Hi yah, I see 'greeable," grinned the black dead-shot, and he picked up the wonderful rifle very willingly.

Frank had stopped the Team facing away from the hill.

He now dismounted from his seat, and picking up the field-glass, tried to discover the outlaws, or catch a glimpse of their habitations.

About a hundred feet up the hill he could see a little cluster of rough houses, made of logs, and standing closely together.

They were five in number, and all one story high.

"Now," said Frank, "if I can get my little four-pounder trained on those buildings, I'll give those chaps such a shaking up that they won't get over it for—"

Crack! sharp and clear.

It was the sound of Frank Reade's remarkable rifle.

Pomp had fired at an outlaw who had exposed himself.

"Ho-ho-ho!" laughed the black, shaking with laughter. "What a funny shot!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" roared Gorse, who had been watching the shot with a telescope. "You didn't allow for the short distance, Pomp; aimed too high, and just burned the end of his nose."

"An' how de cuss did jump!" laughed Pomp.

"Clar' to gosh, I jes' took de end of his nose clean off."

"Give me a help, Barney," said Frank, and the Irishman helped him to remove his suit of armor.

Frank wiped the sweat from his hands and face, and then produced his cans of powder and a number of four-pound balls.

"Shell or solid?" asked Gorse.

"Solid shot," said Frank. "When I've battered them with solid shot then I'll pour in the shells on them. Give us a help, old boy."

They soon had the little cannon loaded

and then Frank lay down in the bottom of the wagon, and, with great care, sighted the piece.

"I've got it now," he said. "A clear sight at about the middle of a house, and I'm going to put a solid shot into that building as sure as I am Frank Reade."

He stood up, cocked the hammer, and attached a strap to the trigger.

"Stand back, all!"

The got out of the way, and Frank fired the cannon.

Boom!

The solid shot had gone forth!

## CHAPTER XXII.

### JOHN GALL'S DISCOVERY.

WHEN the solid shot had gone forth our friends fairly held their breath until the result was ascertained.

They heard a crashing and spluttering, and then followed a loud chorus of angry cries.

"Hurrah!" yelled Frank, and the rest joined in the shout.

"You're right to crow," cried Charley Gorse. "That shot cut right through the middle of a shanty. Give them a second pill before they can recover from the first one."

He rushed to Frank's assistance, and in a moment the gun was reloaded.

Pomp, armed with the long range rifle, was sitting on the driving seat, looking out for heads.

A sentinel incautiously thrust his head from behind the protecting trunk of a tree, and the black dead shot very promptly bored a neat hole through the robber's skull.

An instant later the cannon spoke again, and Frank Reade sent four more pounds of iron crashing through the trees, and plump into another house through a window.

A fresh chorus of cries, mixed with yells and shrieks, told very plainly that the second shot had found some victims.

"Bedad, and it's quare min they are, to be sure," said Barney.

"Why?" asked Charley.

"To sthaye up there beyant the threes, and be pelted wid thim iron fut-balls, whin they could rush down here and gobble the loikes of us."

"They think so, too," said the professor, at that moment. "As true as fate they're rushing down the hill."

It was true.

Goaded to desperation by the dire destruction of the solid shot, Black Jack and his gang poured forth from the huts, and rushed down the hill.

Frank immediately sprang upon the driving seat, and grasped the reins in his hands.

"Lively, Charley," he said. "Load the cannon with a shell, and be ready to pepper them when I give the word."

"All right."

"Pomp, keep loaded, and pick them off whenever you can."

"Ise dar, ebery time."

Letting on an ordinary head of steam, Frank started the Team away from the hills.

The outlaws had rushed down in an excited and disorderly manner, all on foot.

When they reached the foot of the hill they saw the Steam Team moving off in style, and then they realized how foolish it would be on their part to attempt a pursuit.

They stopped short on the very edge of the thin bordering of trees that ran around the base of the hill, and stood there irresolute.

Frank stopped the Team.

"Fire!" he said, and Charley Gorse obeyed the command.

Crash! boom!

The shell careened through the air and caused a hasty scattering on the part of the outlaws, but Charley had not handled the gun skillfully, and the shell broke up among the trees on the hill, where it did no damage to aught but green leaves.

"I kin beat dat 'ar," said Pomp. "Look at dis 'ar agin Chinese labor."

He drew a bead upon a powerful Chinese villain, and fired.

The Chinaman jumped straight up from the ground a distance of three or four feet, and fell dead.

"The Chinese question is settled in this quarter of the world," laughed Frank, and the others applauded the shot.

"The h'infamous h'outcasts h'are 'astily h'ascending the 'ill," said Fitznoodle, looking at the disconcerted crowd of rascals, who had cooled off, and were glad to get out of range from the wagon.

"They're not going very far up the hill, Frank," said Charley, watching them through a glass. "They're taking shelter behind rocks and trees."

"Where I can't reach them," said Frank, in a vexed manner. "Now what am I to do? there is no use throwing away my valuable shot when I can only fire at rocks and trees."

"Well," said Barney, "suppose we make a rush on thim, loike they maned to make on us?"

"Thank you," said Frank, "I've no desire to become a lead mine."

"Let us wait awhile, and see what they will do," said Charley.

"We can't help ourselves," said Frank. "It would be useless to fire at rocks and trees, and I'm positive there's not one of the rascals to be seen. Pomp, keep your eyes skinned, and let us know the first move you see."

"Fo' suah," said the black.

While the black dead-shot watched for any movement on the part of Black Jack and his men, Frank and Charley, feeling tired and sleepy, turned in for a nap.

The professor and Fitznoodle amused themselves with conversation, and Pomp kept silent watch.

The blacksmith said nothing, but he did not seem to like the delay.

He chafed under restraint. His foes were yonder, among the trees, and he longed to strike at them.

He thought of his faithful wife, of his pretty children, of his brother, all slaughtered by the inhuman brute who headed the marauding horde, and his blood boiled.

Another reason, and a powerful one, there was that caused him to writhe with impatience.

Black Jack had destroyed the sight of one eye with a hot iron from the blacksmith's own forge, and now John Gall could feel those peculiar sensations in the remaining eye that told him plainly that the sympathy between the orbs was likely to make him blind.

"I can feel it coming on," he muttered, as he sat gloomily in the bottom of the wagon. "In a few days, less, perhaps, I may be sightless. What will it avail me that my arm be nerved with the strength of revenge? When I have avenged my wife and children, then good-bye to the world. I have naught else to live for. Why should I remain here; had I not better strike while I can see?"

He pondered over it a few moments, and arose from his seat.

"Whar yer gwine?" asked Pomp.

"To the hills," gloomily said Gall, and he shouldered his iron club.

"Now, come back yere, an' don't go foolin' 'round dem 'ar chaps," remonstrated the black, but the blacksmith paid no attention to him, marching off towards the hills in the most reckless manner.

"Massa Frank—Massa Charley, wake up yere," yelled the darkey, arousing the two sleepers.

"You had better come back!" called out the professor.

"Your blood will be h'on your h'own 'ead," cried Fitznoodle. "You are taking your life h'in your 'ands."

But the blacksmith did not deign to turn his head.

Charley and Frank jumped up, saw the departing avenger, leaped from the wagon, and ran after him.

He paused, then, and waited for them to reach him.

"For heaven's sake, man, be just a little bit reasonable," said Charley.

"You are going to certain death," said Frank.

"I am going to blindness," returned the blacksmith: "and before I become so I am going to strike a blow at my enemies. But I am not so rash as you think. I am going to keep fully out of gunshot, and go around the other side of the hill. I can certainly do that quicker than they can climb the hill and descend it, and as they are all on this side at the present time I may be able to secrete myself on the other side. I may be able to help you considerably."

Then he turned away. The lads saw that it was useless to argue with so desperate a man, and so they sadly returned to the wagon.

John Gall struck off into that long, swinging stride that carried him over the ground almost as fast as some horses trot.

He made a wide sweep, so as to keep out of gunshot from the trees until he got past the line where it would be possible for those opposite the wagon to shoot at him, and then he turned in abruptly toward the other side of the hill, and made a swift dash for the protection of the trees.

He ran fleetly, and was nearing the base of the hill without having seen or heard anything, when suddenly a big stone was hurled at him from the trees.

He saw it coming through the air, and it was not a very difficult matter for him to dodge it.

He stopped short, and looked in vain for the person who had hurled the stone at him.

"This is strange," he muttered. "Nobody would hurl a stone at me if they're armed otherwise. I'll make a dash for the spot it came from."

Holding his iron club in a position to strike, he made a swift dash towards the locality from whence the stone had come.

Another stone whizzed through the air.

This time the aim was better, and the stone was hurled more swiftly than the first one had been.

It struck Gall on the thick part of his arm, and caused him to fall on his side.

In an instant three women, one an Indian squaw, and the other two most brutal and depraved-looking white women, rushed from behind a concealing cluster of bushes and rocks, and dashed down upon the blacksmith.

They were armed with knives, and were evidently most willing to sink the keen blades in Gall's body.

But ere they reached the blacksmith the latter was upon his feet, the heavy iron club in his hands.

"I don't want to fight women," he muttered. "but it's their lives or mine, so down they go."

"Cut his heart out!" yelled one of the white women, and then they closed in upon him.

Very reluctantly, indeed, Gall struck at them. It is probable that they did not know the club was an iron one.

The squaw was the first one that was struck. Her head was cracked in half a dozen spots.

Then Gall made a quick lunge at one of the white women, struck her in the back and knocked her over.

The other one turned from him in the greatest terror, ran shrieking from the trees, and dashed out upon the plains.

He looked after her, and saw that she was running straight away from the hill at the top of her speed.

Then, as he gazed after the female fugitive, he became aware that she was dashing along a plainly marked track, and looking beyond her, he saw, far away, a confused mass receding in the distance.

An idea occurred to him.

In the most reckless manner he ran up the hill, reached the group of huts, and gazed down the hill.

With immense, flying leaps he dashed down the side of the hill, and in less than two minutes stood at the base of the elevation.

Swiftly he ran over the prairie to the spot where the Team stood, and the rest of the

party jumped from the wagon and ran to meet him.

"Fine hunters!" he cried, bitterly. "To fall asleep and let your game make off in broad daylight. Black Jack and his men are miles away."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### FRANK PLAYS "POKER" AT LONG RANGE.

YES, it was true that Black Jack, profiting by the inactivity of his foes, had escaped with his band, leaving only a few women on the hill.

The horses were very tired, but they were compelled to gallop along, spurred on by their cruel riders.

They had been gone fully half an hour from the hill when Gall discovered the fact.

"If we could only hide our trail, then we could soon give them the slip," said Black Jack to one of his men, as they rode at the head of the cavalcade. "But they will soon find out that we are gone, and in less than an hour that cursed Steam Team can overhaul us. We've got most of our traps and household goods on the pack-horses, and if we get away from them for two hours, I'll engage that they never overhaul us."

"Why not?"

"Because there's a stream that we can reach in about that time. It's only a creek, about forty or fifty feet wide, and not more than three feet deep at any part. By walking the horses down the stream for a mile, touching at various points, and making false trails which lead back into the water again, we could probably throw them entirely off the track."

"Your hope is in vain," said the other, glancing back over the plain, and scowling angrily. "They are after us now."

Black Jack turned in his saddle, and saw the Steam Team plunging after him at a rate that was rapidly overhauling the tired horses.

"Curses on the luck," he cried. "Some of us are doomed men. They are carrying out a splendid plan of operations. They first pursue you and pepper you with a long-range rifle that outshoots all I ever saw, and then when you turn on them, they turn tail and blaze at you with their shells and solid shot, running off just fast enough so that you can't catch them. I begin to feel terrified with such an enemy pursuing me."

"Brace up," said the other, who was now looked upon as being second in command; "I think that if we can reach that island yonder I can outwit even this terrible enemy."

(On the plains it is customary to call the groves islands.)

"I only hope you may," said the leader of the outlaws. "This little cuss is the worst enemy I ever had. Clap on all speed, boys, and see if we can't get to yonder island."

The grove was now not more than a mile away.

Spurs were deeply sunk into the sides of the jaded animals, and the beasts exerted themselves to the utmost.

The shrill neighing of the Steam Team rang out.

Frank Reade was not more than a mile behind, and was coming on as fast as he cared to do.

Crack!

A rifle-shot rang out.

To the ears of most of the cavalcade of outlaws the report sounded like the popping of a cracker, or the snap of a toy torpedo, so far away was the weapon.

"I'm a goner!" cried one of the men at the rear of the troop, and he swayed in the saddle.

For a moment he clutched at the air in a vain endeavor to save himself, and then fell headlong to the ground, while his horse, riderless, dashed away over the plain.

"That long-range rifle again!" snarled Black Jack. "And the fellow that handles it is a dead shot. If he could only keep on one track long enough he would be sure of killing us all off, one by one."

They spurred on as swiftly as possible toward

the grove, straining every nerve to reach there before more of them were picked off.

It was in vain.

In less than three minutes the rifle cracked again, and the black marksman added another one to the long list of victims he had brought down with Frank's wonderful rifle.

"On—on!" roared Black Jack, fearing that he might be the target for the next bullet. "Let us get away from that long-range gun."

At the top of their speed they rushed for the grove.

Just as they reached it Pomp fired again, breaking the arm of a rider, and putting a bullet through the head of a horse.

But they darted into the grove, and were safe from the long-range gun, handled so skillfully by the colored dead shot.

The Steam Team came to a halt at a carefully estimated position, which placed Frank Reade and his friends out of ordinary gunshot from the grove, while those in the grove, should they expose themselves, could be riddled by Pomp.

The wagon was swung around before the Team came to a halt. The horses faced away from the grove, and the shining muzzle of the four-pounder pointed towards the trees.

"Well, here we are," said the leader, as he sat down on the grass, "and here we shall have to stay until we get a good chance to give this fellow the slip."

"That's where you're mistaken," said his right-hand man.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there they are, and there they will stay, until we take possession of the Steam Team!"

"Sam Townley, what are you getting through yourself?" demanded Black Jack, puzzled to account for the meaning of the other's words.

He was a Canadian, this Townley, a smart fellow who might have been almost anything, but much preferred to be a rascal.

"I mean what I say," he said. "They are out there, and while we remain in this grove they are not likely to get away from that position, where they could rake us."

"True."

"Then depend on it, you ain't going to be fool enough to get out of this grove by daylight."

"No, nor by starlight, either," said the leader. "That electric light gives us no show."

"Then," said Townley, "you can take my word for it, that if the Steam Team stays around here over night then the Steam Team will become our property within a few hours."

"How can you do it?"

"I'll keep my plans to myself," said Sam Townley. "What will you give me if I succeed?"

"All my share in the next two raids we make," said Black Jack.

"It's a bargain," said Townley. "That matter is settled. Now let's amuse ourselves until evening, when my time will come."

"Have a game of poker?"

"Yes."

"Then get two more, and we'll have a game right on the grass."

"All right," said Townley, and he got two more players.

They sat down on the grass, using a level stump for a table, and the cards were dealt.

"Chip a dollar," said Black Jack, and threw the piece of silver down upon the stump.

"Raise you a couple," said the next man, and down went the money.

"I stand the raise," said Townley, as he looked at his cards.

The last "sayer" sat next to him.

"What do you do, Bill?" asked Townley, as the man looked at his cards.

"Oh, I guess I can lay over every one of you," said the fellow. "I'm just a-going to—"

It's an open question as to where he did go to!

Boom!

The deep note of that gallant little four-pound gun rang out.

Whizz!

The solid shot whistled through a small opening between the leaves, discovered by Frank Reade with the assistance of a glass, and

so well aimed was the ball that it cut fairly through Bill's neck.

The head fell fairly on top of the money, so it lay on the stump, and the body fell back on the greensward.

Frank Reade had covered the stakes in such a manner that none of the gamblers cared to raise them.

"Ugh!" shuddered Black Jack, for, brute as he was, there was something so horrible and terrifying about this peculiar incident that it struck a sickly chill to his frame. "What a way for a man to die."

Leaving the money and the bloody head all on the stump, they hastily walked away from such a dangerous spot.

"He is doing well," muttered Townley, glancing out through the trees towards Frank Reade's halting-place, "but when darkness comes on, then I shall put in some of my fine work, and the Steam Team will belong to me!"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### "MUST WE DIE LIKE RATS IN A TRAP?"

"THAT WAS A splendid shot," said Professor Isaac Newton Smith, who had taken the glass from Frank when the latter sighted the gun.

"You cut one head off at least. I couldn't see where the ball went, but I could see that much of the damage it did."

"I'll make it hot for them before I get through with them," said Frank. "I'm sorry that there isn't more of the afternoon left, so that I might get half a dozen cracks at the rascals."

Night came on rapidly, however, and soon the grove was shrouded in a veil of gloom.

"Now," said Frank, when night had fairly fallen, "I'm going to move about two or three hundred yards to the left. My idea is that they might attempt a night attack, and, knowing our exact location, would ride straight at us. Then we'd hear, and be prepared for them."

"That's a good idea," said Charley. "How will you guard to-night?"

"With my posts and wire, the same as I did last night."

He went a few hundred yards to the left, and then came to a halt.

Supper was prepared and eaten, and all hands assisted Frank to drive his posts into the ground and connect his wire.

Then they had a smoke and told stories in a low tone, keeping on the alert for the slightest sound that might be borne to their ears.

"For," said Frank, "although I do not think that they would try to get away in the darkness on such tired horses, yet they might do so, and I want to be able to hear them."

The young genius felt quite positive in his own mind that the outlaws, in sheer desperation, would attack the wagon during the night, so he prepared many surprising little things for their benefit, and laid the little party out in watches; Pomp and Fitznoodle to be awakened at midnight by Gall, who would stand guard until then, when the professor and Charley would take it from two o'clock until four, and Barney and Frank would finish.

Hour after hour went by. Midnight passed, and no alarm.

The blacksmith fancied that he heard peculiar sounds, but he was unable to determine what they meant.

During the other watches no sounds of a suspicious nature reached the ears of the watchers, and so passed the night, and the gray streaks chased the darkness away.

"What the devil is them same black spots be-yant?" asked Barney, as the curtain of night began to roll up.

Frank followed the indication of the outstretched finger, and through the half and half light beheld some dark object some five hundred feet or more from the wagon.

"What can it be?" he muttered.

"Begob, and there's no less nor four of the varmints," said Barney, pointing on all sides.

In a few moments they had very good daylight, and as soon as it was quite clear—

Bang!

A puff of smoke came from one of the dark

objects, and a bullet carried off a little piece of Barney's left ear.

The report would have brought all the sleepers to their feet, had not Frank shouted out:

"Down low! Don't expose your bodies, these are danger."

"H'ah, don't mention such a word, h'I h'en-treat you," cried Fitznoodle, and the professor, likewise, turned pale.

"What is it?" asked John Gall.

"Look out through the loop-holes on all sides and you will see," said Frank, in a bitter tone. "My friends, I think we're doomed."

"Doomed?" cried the others, in a loud chorus.

"Yes," said Frank. "We are now in a perfect trap, and ten to one we shall never get out of it alive."

The others looked through the holes in the sides of the wagon, and this is what they saw.

On all sides of the wagon, forming a rather irregular circle, there ran a trench.

This trench had been made about three feet wide, and probably fully as deep.

The Steam Team never could cross that gutter until it was either filled up or bridged across, and Frank Reade had not been slow to recognize that fact when he caught sight of the trench.

About ten feet back of the line of this trench, and placed at about an equal distance apart, stood the strange affairs that had puzzled Barney Shea.

Stakes had been driven into the ground, and projected about four feet above the plain. A cross stake had been placed on the uprights, which stood, perhaps, six feet apart, and over the cross-piece had been thrown two or three buffalo skins.

Furthermore, in front of this curtain, as it might be called, the workmen who dug the trench had piled up a heavy embankment of earth, which came nearly as high as the stakes, and was somewhat wider than the stretch of the buffalo robes.

Picture to yourself the freshly made trench, the buffalo curtains and the breastwork of earth and stipes, and also take into consideration the fact that there were three men behind each of the four breastworks, and you have a correct idea of the true situation, and can appreciate Frank Reade's gloomy concern.

Charley raised his head to obtain a clearer view of the surroundings.

Bang went a gun. A bullet whizzed very close to his head, apprising him of the fact that the men behind the buffalo robes were constantly on the lookout for a human target.

"Have a care, all of you," said Frank. "If they reduce our numbers it will not be long before they would make an attack in full force, and then good-bye to us for all time; but they don't care about facing seven sure bullets."

"Lord, what a trap," said Gorse. "We are fairly caught. But, Frank, couldn't you batter that curtain down? I know that a couple of well-seasoned buffalo skins are more than a match for a bullet, but your four-pound balls ought to tell."

"What's the use?" said Frank. "I have not got a great many, and it would take half a dozen shots to knock away one of those breastworks, and even then they could drop into the ditch and we'd be but little better off. No, it's no use wasting my big shot."

"Put on your suit, and then you can take a look around," said Gorse, and Frank lost no time in donning his well tried suit of armor.

Then he stood up in the body of the wagon, and looked comprehensively on all sides.

Crackety—crack—crack, rang out the reports from all sides, and fully half a dozen bullets rattled against the suit, and fell, flattened to the floor of the car, or struck his friends as they rebounded from his mail-clad form.

Frank could not refrain from putting the thumb of his right hand against the end of his nose, or where his nose ought to be, and, as well as he could with gloves, gently working his fingers, which called forth a howl of rage from his concealed enemies.

"Well, I can't see much more now than I

saw before," said Frank. "Yes, I can see that the gang still occupies the grove, and some of them are exposed. Pomp, is that rifle loaded?"

"Yes, sah."

"Give it to me."

He caught up the wonderful rifle, and brought it to his shoulder.

One swift glance through the powerful telescopic sight that seemed to bring the living mark almost within reach, and then he fired.

The crash of the rifle mingled with the howl of a member of the gang, who fell to the ground and then crawled into the grove.

"We ain't dead yet," said Frank. "We have yet the power to make those wolves hunt cover. But," and he turned to his friends with a shake of his head, "we are in a trap, and to save my life I do not see how we are going to get out of it, either. We have quite a good supply of food, but our water will not last more than a day. To attempt to cross that trench would be to smash up the Team and wagon, and then we would certainly be at the mercy of those fiends, who are at this moment thirsting for our blood."

"Dar's one fing' kin be did," observed the black athlete.

"What?"

"Dis chile am the bestest runner around dese yere parts."

"And suppose you are."

"I kin run to the nearest fort an' fotch the sojers yere a-flying," earnestly said the brave fellow.

"If courage could do it you'd win," said Frank. "But, my brave Pomp, you'd never get across that trench alive. Good Heaven! is there no remedy? must we die like rats in a trap?"

## CHAPTER XXV.

### SHOT AND SHELL.

It seemed as though Frank Reade, in his passionate outburst, had fairly struck the keynote of the situation.

Really, they appeared doomed to die like "rats in a trap."

"Allowing that a man, by the greatest good luck, might be able to pass beyond the tent-like affairs," said the professor, pointing to the buffalo skins behind the breastwork, "and also allowing that he might escape unharmed from the bullets of the men behind them, he certainly could not escape from the mounted men, who would gallop forth from the grove in numbers, and soon ride him down."

"True enough," said Frank.

"It's no use, Pomp," said Charley to the eager darkey, "you'd only be rushing to your death."

And so Pomp's idea had, perforce, to be abandoned.

"Young man," said the solemn voice of the blacksmith.

"Well, sir?" said Frank.

"You must not think that because you are trapped that those rascals over yonder will try to starve you out ere they try speedier measures. I warn you that before long they will try to take you by storm. You cannot run away: they can easily leap their horses across the trench, and can attack you in such force that they may carry all before them."

"By Heaven, he is right!" cried Gorse. What is to prevent them?"

"I had not thought of that," said the young leader.

Crack!

A rifle-shot rang out, and a bullet struck Frank's head-gear.

It turned him around a trifle, but rebounded harmlessly.

One of the concealed marksmen had tried a shot at the headpin, thinking, probably, that he might penetrate it with a bullet.

After that they wasted no more balls on Frank Reade.

"I must prepare against this probable attack," said the leader. "My gallant little four-pounder is loaded with a destructive shell. Now to fix it so that I can cover a foe coming from any quarter."

He reached down under the carriage of the gun, and seized a protruding shank of iron.

"This works the screw that elevates or lowers the gun," he said to the blacksmith. "You turn it until I tell you to stop."

Gall took the iron bar in his strong hands, and began working it around.

The screw was well oiled, and moved with ease.

Gradually it arose, and at length the gun appeared above the top of the wagon body, supported by a solid steel screw shank not less than four inches in diameter, and fully able to withstand the recoil.

The heavy piece was not adjusted a moment too soon.

"Stop," said Frank, and as he uttered the word a wild yell arose on the still, morning air, and in full force the outlaws issued from the grove, all on horseback, and brandishing their weapons in the air.

With a wild cheer they came spurring towards the trench.

"As you value your lives do not raise your heads above the sides of the wagon," said Frank. "Fire through the loop-holes."

And as for himself, he stood by his gun, ready to meet the oncoming foe with a shell.

It was an easy matter to turn the gun around by means of the screw, and Frank brought it to bear upon the advancing horde.

Some of these latter, riding in the van of the attacking party, saw the muzzle of the cannon.

They had thought, doubtless, that the piece could only be discharged from the rear of the wagon, and in making an attack on the side of the vehicle they would run no risk of being saluted with big balls.

They now discovered their error, and having a wholesale fear of the little thunderer, they set up a loud shout:

"The big gun—the big gun!"

This had the effect of bringing the entire party to a halt, just on the very verge of the trench.

But they had halted too late.

Frank, judging that they had come near enough to his party, had fired the piece at the very moment that they halted.

Boom!

The cannon spoke.

The shell crashed in among horses and men, and broke where it had fallen to the ground.

The yells and curses of the men, and the shrill neighing of the frightened horses created a pandemonium, and threw the attacking party in the wildest disorder.

Frank cast one hasty glance at his foes, saw that the shot had told with fearful effect, and without an instant's delay he caught up the prepared cartridge and shoved it in the breach of the gun.

"Now I am ready to give them a second dose," he said.

"They'll not need a second dose of that physic this time," said Gorse, and he was right.

When the shell burst it killed four or five men outright, and wounded as many more, some slightly and some seriously.

The horses kicked, reared, plunged, tore up and down, and acted in the wildest manner.

Only those well accustomed to the saddle could retain their seats on the backs of their steeds.

Fitznoodle, greatly worked up by this absorbing scene, forgot about the caution he had received from the young leader.

He jumped up in order to obtain a better view of the badly demoralized outlaws, and thus foolishly exposed his body to the eyes of the concealed marksmen lying behind the buffalo hides.

Bang went a rifle on one side, and bang went a rifle on the other side, and with a loud yell Fitznoodle fell to the floor of the wagon.

"H'oh—h'oh, why did h'I h'e'ver come to this 'eathenish land," he groaned, rolling about. "H'I'm shot h'in a dozen places, h'and there's no 'ope for me."

One of the plunging horses threw his rider. Then he made another mad leap, and landed within the circle marked by the trench.

With flaming eyes the terrified horse plunged

across the plain, rushing onward in a track that must bring him close to the wagon.

Gorse was peering through one of the loop-holes in the side of the wagon, when he suddenly felt a hand at his belt, and saw his long range revolver disappear.

He turned around, and was in time to behold a dark form leap from the wagon, and to hear Frank Reade give utterance to a command that was issued in vain.

Pomp had leaped from the wagon, with only the long-range revolver for a weapon.

"Come back!" yelled Frank.

"Come back!" shouted Charley. "I tell you to come back."

But Pomp heeded them not.

He thought that he saw a chance to carry out his idea, and he was not going to let it slip by without trying to improve the opportunity.

He saw a horse running towards the wagon, he saw the outlaws thrown into a state of confusion which made it improbable that they would pursue him, and he made up his mind to risk the marksmen behind the four barricades, and endeavor to leave that part of the country.

Like a meteor he flew towards the horse.

The men behind the buffalo hides were on the lookout.

They poured in a united volley upon the darkey, but Pomp was leaping so wildly that their efforts to draw a bead on him were in vain.

A single bullet struck the revolver he carried in his hand, and sent it flying from his grasp.

The black athlete recognized his danger, but he kept on, leaping up and down in the most crazy manner imaginable, with the idea of distracting the outlaws' aim.

He regained his pistol, throwing himself on the ground to do so, and then rebounded like a rubber ball, and caught the terrified horse by the mane.

With the ease of a practiced acrobat he threw himself on the horse's back, extended his form at length, yelled at the steed with all his lung power, and dashed over the wire fence.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### FRANK'S TERRIBLE WEAPON.

"THE brave fellow is lost!" cried the young leader.

"Maybe not," said Charley, peering out through a loop-hole. "He's lucky enough to get through anything."

And he was right.

The outlaws behind the barricades poured in another hasty volley, as the horse bounded away with Pomp clinging to him.

Only one of the bullets took effect, and that one raised a furrow on the flank of the already frightened horse, and had the effect of making him leap on faster than ever.

He was a good horse, too; a well-built, clean-limbed stallion, with a stride like that of a camel.

In less than half a minute he had taken the courageous Pomp out of gunshot, and Frank felt the emotion of hope arise again in his heart as he saw the black speeding away like a rocket.

"Hurrah!" he yelled, and the others, comprehending that Pomp had run the gauntlet in safety, echoed the cheer with a will.

"Didn't I tell you?" said Charley. "That nigger is full of pluck."

But the next moment half a dozen of the mounted outlaws extricated themselves from the ruck, and with a loud yell put spurs to their horses and darted away in hot pursuit of the darkey.

One of the men stationed behind the barricades stepped out for an instant to look after the darkey.

He paid a speedy penalty for his rash act.

Frank caught up a rifle, intending to fire upon him, but ere he could bring the weapon to his shoulder, a gun cracked at his very feet, and the outlaw tumbled lifeless.

The blacksmith had been waiting for just such a chance, and had fired an accurate shot.

At full speed the half dozen mounted outlaws darted away in pursuit of Pomp, and it will

readily be believed by the reader that the people in the wagon watched the race eagerly.

"That seems a good horse on which he is mounted," said Frank.

"So I think," remarked the professor, who was paying attention to the wounded Fitznoodle.

"Is he badly hurt?" asked Frank, looking down at the Englishman, who had fainted.

"Mr. Fitznoodle is much frightened and a little hurt," said the professor, with a grin.

"See, one bullet clipped off a piece of his left ear, and the other just passed through the fleshy part of his left arm. However, he imagines himself mortally wounded."

The remaining outlaws had come to their senses and regained control of their horses by this time, and they hastily gathered up their wounded and galloped back to the grove, leaving their dead on the plain.

"Well," said Frank, "they didn't make much by that charge."

"I should say not," said Charley Gorse, looking after the discomfited rascals as they retreated. "They'll not be in a hurry to make another charge while that cannon can be brought to bear on them."

"Pomp is out of sight," said Gall, "and the others are fading."

Frank looked, and just saw the outlaws fading from view in the distance.

"A stern chase is a long chase," said the professor. "If he is well mounted, I doubt that they'll catch him."

"I'm very glad that the horse did not break my fence down," said Frank. "Now I can have a light on all sides through the night if necessary."

"But can't you, with all your inventive genius, devise something to dislodge those fellows lying behind the four barricades?" asked Charley.

"Let me think," said Frank.

He sat down on the side of the wagon, and thought long and deeply.

At length an idea seemed to flash across his mind.

"I have it," he said.

"What is it?" demanded Gorse.

"Well, it's only an idea, and I may not be able to carry it out," said Frank. "I am encumbered with this suit, and it will hinder me greatly, I fear, in executing this idea. However, I will try."

He bent down, and unlocked one of the many drawers.

Reposing in this drawer was a box, not more than six inches square.

"Open that box," said Frank to Charley, handing it to him, "and for your life go easy about it."

"What does it contain?"

"Balls of nitro-glycerine."

"You have no need to caution again," said Gorse. "I've heard of it."

He carefully removed the sliding-cover, and revealed a number of thin glass balls, filled with nitro-glycerine.

The balls were all about six inches in diameter.

Charley Gorse regarded the light yellow liquid inclosed in the glass balls with curiosity.

"What can it do?" he asked.

"Well, you can imagine what it can do," put in the professor, peering over his shoulder, "when I inform you that the explosive power of that yellow paste is thirteen times that of the very best gunpowder."

"Thunder!" cried Charley. "Then one of those balls would blow us all to pieces."

"You are right," said Frank. "See how I am forced to carry them."

Each glass sphere was surrounded by soft cotton, and lay in a small compartment, so that one ball did not touch the other.

"Had one of those balls exploded, the entire lot would have gone," said Frank. "Such an explosion would have blown us and the wagon to the four winds of Heaven, and even dismembered the Team."

Charley shuddered at the thought.

"Now," said Frank, "pick one of them out very carefully, cotton and all, and place it in

my hand. Of course my fingers are rather clumsy in these gloves of steel."

Very gingerly Charley Gorse picked out one of the balls from the box, and placed it in Frank's hand.

"Now," said the latter, "I intend to throw this ball somewhere near that little fort yonder," pointing to the buffalo hides on the south, "and as I can't throw it from here, I am going to go about half way there, and then cast it as well as I can. If they make a rush at me—attack me before I throw the ball, all the better, for then you can pepper them with your rifles, and I shall have a fairer chance at them, too. Please place my revolver in the place for it at my side."

The loaded revolver was placed in a socket at the side of the suit, and then Frank carefully jumped down from the wagon, taking great care to grasp the ball lightly.

Through the loop-holes the rest of the party, with the exception of poor Fitznoodle, watched their leader with intense interest.

"He's the most wonderful little jaynus in the worruld," said Barney, who had been despondent and silent up to the present moment. "Begorra, an' the little devil handles lightning the same as wather. Cheer up, byes, for be the smoke of Kate Kelly's pipe, he'll take us out of this inconvenient situation."

Very boldly Frank Reade advanced towards the southern barricade.

He had not gone a hundred feet from the wagon, when a number of shots were fired, coming from two or three different quarters.

Several of the bullets struck him but did no harm.

He kept straight on, and they fired no more useless shots.

One outlaw stationed at the western barricade was so excited by this odd movement on Frank's part, that he forgot his customary caution, and for the purpose of obtaining a good view of our hero, he thrust his head into view from behind the protecting buffalo hides.

The avenger in the wagon was on the lookout.

Crack went his rifle, and the bullet penetrated the skull of the incautious outlaw.

"One less," said Gall, withdrawing the rifle and seizing a loaded one. "My debt of vengeance grows less."

With a steady stride Frank Reade advanced towards the southern barricade, holding the ball concealed in his right hand.

At the distance of a hundred and fifty feet from the buffalo hides he came to a halt.

He raised his right hand, planted his left foot firmly, measured the throw with his eye, and then cast the ball high up into the air.

Very gracefully the terrible explosive careened towards the mark.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### CONCLUSION.

THE ball was well thrown.

It ascended fully fifty feet in the air, and then descended, falling in a direct line, which brought it fairly behind the buffalo hides.

Boom!

A thundering crash rang out; a loud booming that shocked the ears, and made the ground tremble.

Then followed a terrible sight.

Dismembered portions of the human form flew up into the air. Arms and legs chased heads and headless trunks in a ghastly race, and hands, pieces of buffalo hide, portions of earth and rock, weapons, articles of attire, all mingled in one floating panorama.

It was a terrible death, and yet must have been as painless as it was instantaneous.

The barricade was torn away, and shattered by the force of the mighty explosion, and a close view was thus obtained.

In a perfect shower the torn and mutilated fragments, human and otherwise, descended from the air, and then Frank saw that his enemies had been swept away like chaff before the wind.

He looked at the remaining three barricades. Not one of the men behind them was to be

seen. An expression of satisfaction escaped Frank's lips.

"I understand it," he said. "I have got them in a much worse trap than they had me in. They dare not stir out from behind the buffalo skins, for fear of getting plugged with bullets from the wagon, and if they stay where they are, they'll get blown to atoms."

He immediately set off on a run to the wagon.

"One gone," he shouted. "Charley, give me another ball."

He stretched his hand up over the side of the wagon, and Charley handed him another ball.

"Keep on the lookout for them," said Frank. "If they expose an inch of their bodies let them have a bullet through it."

"Niver fare, ma bouchal," cried the Irishman.

"Have they shown themselves at the grove?" asked Frank.

"Yes, when that ball exploded they all rushed out for a view," said the professor, "and there may be half a dozen of them standing on the edge of the grove now."

"Keep a sharp lookout for them," said Frank, "and if they make a charge while I am carrying out this work you must give me warning by blowing the steam whistle, so that I can get back to handle the cannon. Keep a sharp lookout—"

"Hold on," said Charley. "How about the steam? are the fires alight?"

Frank had forgotten them in the great excitement.

He at once placed the ball carefully on the ground, and went to inspect the fires.

He found them rather low, but not yet out. However, one glance at the steam gauges convinced him that Charley never would have been able to blow the steam whistle to warn him of danger.

The water supply, on examination, proved to be all right, and Frank lost no time in replenishing the fires.

"It's all right now," he said to Charley Gorse. "In five minutes there will be a head of steam that would carry us on at fifty miles an hour—if we could only get away."

Then he picked up the glass ball once more, and started towards the eastern barricade.

As he walked steadily towards them, the men behind the buffalo hides could not resist the temptation to fire at such a fair target, and they blazed away in concert, but, of course, their bullets did Frank no harm.

He advanced steadily, gained a similar position to that obtained before, and once again hurled the terrible weapon high into the air.

His aim was as good as on the first trial; the sphere descended in a graceful curve, and struck the crosspin that supported the buffalo hides.

Boom!

Another mighty roar.

The results of the second explosion were similar to the first. Perhaps the men were blown

into somewhat smaller fragments, but the ghastly scene was about the same.

Frank, peering through the bars of the visor, beheld two objects flying up that seemed familiar to his gaze, and he watched them intently as they came down.

Two spades!

Frank cast one swift glance on all sides. He had destroyed two of the barriers, and a position midway between the two shattered breastworks would bring a man out of gunshot from the remaining two.

The young leader decided upon his course at once.

He lifted his visor to allow his voice to be heard, and shouted out:

"Gall and Barney, jump down out of the wagon as soon as Charley drives up to this spot. Charley, smash right through the wire guard, and drive within ten feet of where I stand."

"All right!" shouted back Gorse, and the next minute, although no driver was visible, the legs of the Steam Team began to move, and the big wagon was wheeled around so as to follow Frank Reade.

The latter ran on, reached the scene of the latest disaster, and caught up the two long-handled spades from the ground.

The Team smashed through the wire fence without difficulty, and at a walk advanced towards Frank.

The latter stood about ten feet from the trench, holding the two spades.

The Team came to a halt. Down leaped the blacksmith and Barney.

"Take these spades," said Frank; "work like heroes, and fill up a space wide enough for the Team and the wagon to go across. You are out of gunshot from the two remaining outposts, and I'll protect you from a general attack with the cannon."

He leaped up into the wagon, and the two men fell to work with a will. The dirt seemed to fly in a cloud, and the trench was being rapidly filled up with earth and stones.

Charley Gorse left the wagon, and as the Irishman paused for an instant he caught the spade from his hand, and worked fast and furiously.

Then Barney relieved the blacksmith, and under their combined efforts the work which delighted Frank Reade went on rapidly. The trench at that point was fast disappearing when a loud shout rang out, and the outlaws came galloping forth from the grove once more, and the men stationed behind the buffalo hides left their places and came on at a run to take part in the fight.

"Rush us across," shouted Charley, as he and the others leaped into the wagon, hot and dirty. "I think we can do it now."

Frank seized the reins, clapped on a good head of steam, and faced the filled-in portion. There was a scraping, a scattering of dirt, and then they were across.

"Hurrah!" they cried, as the Steam Team bounded away. "Safe again."

But the outlaws come on as steadily as be-

fore, and at this moment the half-dozen men who had gone in pursuit of Pomp appeared, coming on at a full gallop.

"Ra—ta—ta—ta—ta—ta—ta—tal!" sounded in the air, and a cry burst from Gorse as he heard the sound.

"Cavalry!" he shouted, and an instant later a troop of cavalry appeared over a rise in the plain, in hot pursuit of the half dozen outlaws.

Pomp, who had met the soldiers by pure chance, was riding at the head of the troop.

The outlaws saw their danger, and Black, Jack shouted the command for a retreat, but the order came too late to save them.

The troopers swept down upon them like a tornado, and gave them no chance to run away.

"Be Heavens, give us a show!" shouted Barney, and Frank wheeled the Team, and soon came to a halt at the scene of the conflict.

All but the professor and Fitznoodle leaped from the wagon, and took part in the hand-to-hand fight that now ensued.

John Gall grasped his iron club, and with a terrible smile on his solemn face, he fought his way through the contending ranks towards the spot where Black Jack was battling for his life.

He reached the spot.

"Stand aside!" he cried, to the soldiers, who were battling with the outlaw. "He is mine—mine!"

He raised his club, and struck Black Jack from the saddle. The villain fell at his feet.

"For my wife, for my children, for my brother!" shrieked Gall, and struck again, crushing the head of his enemy; but falling at the very same instant himself, with a bullet through his heart. After that, deprived of their leader, all the outlaws threw down their arms and surrendered, and, as Barney remarked to Frank, "spoiled the most illegant shindy ye could ax for, bedad."

Frank searched in the grove and found the treasure-box, and this he took in charge for the dead blacksmith, and by the next day he delivered it safely to the justice of the peace at Reefe's Bluff.

Here Fitznoodle and the professor took leave of them, the former, who had his arm in a sling, remarking:

"H'I don't mind the h'excitement, ye know, but h'I can't stand the 'ot shot, h'and the wounds, ye know."

They had kept their promises to the villagers, and had restored the treasure-box. Now they must start off anew, in search of fresh adventure, and that is just what they did do, Pomp and Barney playing a grand overture with violin and banjo, and Frank and his cousin singing in chorus.

And the author is assured that wherever our heroes may travel, the readers of the Boys or New York will wish success and luck to "Frank Reade and His Steam Team."

[THE END.]

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